

Serra+Connects

Connecting Serra Clubs Around the World + Abiding as One in Christ

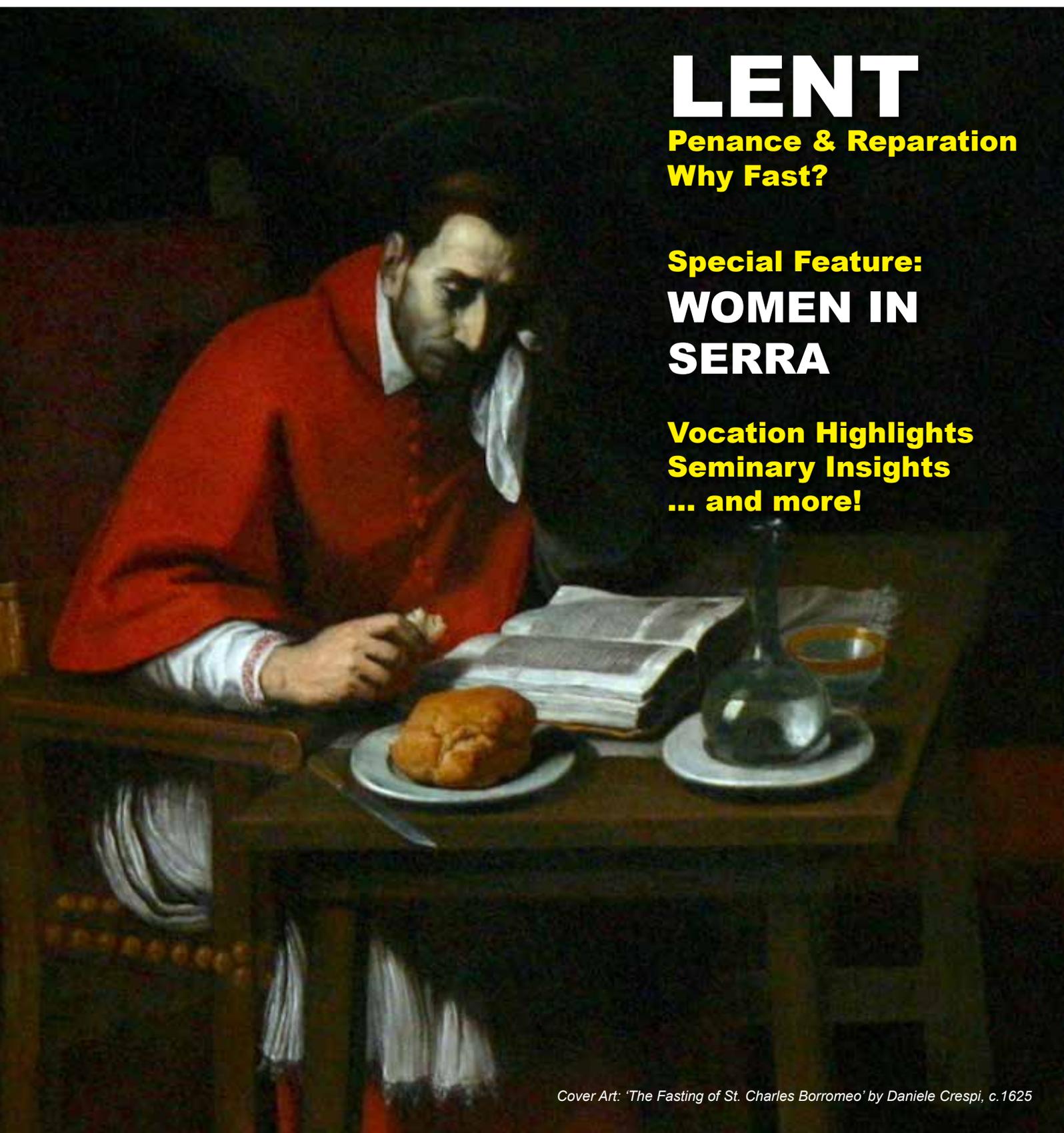
Issue No. 11 • March-April 2014

LENT

**Penance & Reparation
Why Fast?**

**Special Feature:
WOMEN IN
SERRA**

**Vocation Highlights
Seminary Insights
... and more!**



My Dear Fellow Serrans,

Shalom!

Lent for me is a life-changing season of the Church's Liturgical year. It is the time that I try to withdraw from the busyness of the world so that I can be more focused on God. It is also the time that I try to make sacrifices as I join the Church in uniting this time of sacrifice and penance with the sufferings of Christ and prepare to welcome our Risen Lord at Easter.

And, it was only since my Club (Serra Club of Singapore) started implementing the "Lenten Eucharistic Adoration Project" in 2007 that I started to appreciate the season of Lent even better. The project encouraged all of us in the Club to do an hour of Eucharistic Adoration each day and to offer a fast or abstinence for 40 days. The first year was a big struggle for me as I had to juggle work and Church ministry commitments and trying to set aside time for an hour of Eucharistic Adoration each day. And, of course, having to do business trips during the period made it even more challenging for me to fulfill the requirements of the project. However, having gone through seven cycles of the "Lenten Eucharistic Adoration Project", I must admit that I have truly benefited from the time spent with our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and also from losing a few pounds through fasting during Lent.

This year, I hope you will join me to recite a decade of the holy Rosary daily from Ash Wednesday (5 March) to Holy Saturday (19 April) for the intention stated below as well as to pray and meditate on Psalm 51 daily and to participate in the Stations of the Cross at our respective parishes.

We pray for Serrans all over the world to use this period of Lent to empty ourselves through personal prayer, repentance, penance and sacrifices so that God can sanctify us and make us effective and faithful instruments

in the Serra lay apostolate of promoting vocations to the priesthood, and that we will continue to have a deep love for the Eucharist and be ardent promoters of vocations to the priesthood.

In this issue of Serra Connects, we feature interviews with several outstanding women leaders in Serra all over the world. I hope you will take time to read the interview of each of these inspiring women leaders. And, I hope they will continue to inspire more men and women to serve in the Serra lay apostolate for vocations. I also hope that more women leaders would come forward to serve on the Serra Councils and Serra International Board of Trustees.

We are also grateful to Fr. Joe Scerbo, S.A. and Fr. James Presta, Vice Rector of Mundelein Seminary for their respective contributions to this issue of Serra Connects.

Lastly, I hope that you will join me in praying for the continuing work of Serra International Foundation and that the Holy Spirit will guide Steven Zabicki, the Foundation's President and all the members serving on the Foundation Board.

I wish everyone a life-transforming season of Lent!

Mary, Mother of Vocations, pray for us!

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Sean Yeo

President, Serra International
Editor, Serra Connects

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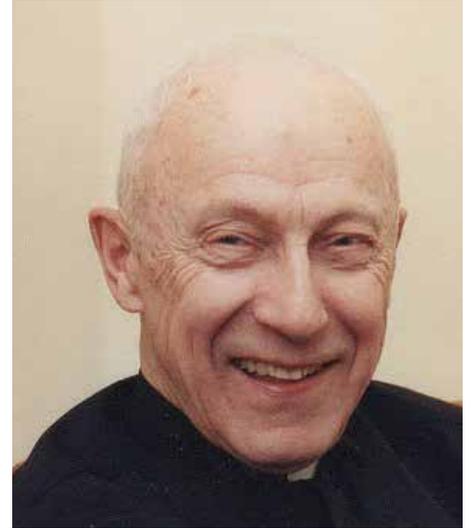
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Penance and Reparation A Lenten Meditation

by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.



Penance and reparation are the consequence of sin. Or again, penance and reparation are the price we have to pay for our own and other people's sin. Penance and reparation, finally, are what God requires from sinners as a condition for showing them His mercy.

In order to better understand the meaning of penance and reparation, we have to look for a moment at what happens whenever we sin. Two things happen:

- First: we incur guilt before God for the self-will that caused us to sin. We become more or less separated or estranged from God, depending on the gravity of our sin.
- Second: We deserve punishment for the disorder we cause by our sinful conduct. We become liable to suffering pain, again more or less pain, depending on how seriously we have done wrong.

Against this background, we can more easily see the meaning of penance and reparation.

- Penance is the repentance we must make to remove the guilt, or to reinstate ourselves in God's friendship.
- Reparation is the pain we must endure to make up for the harm we brought about by our self-indulgence when we sinned.

What then do penance and reparation have in common? They have this in common, that they are absolutely necessary if the justice of God is to be satisfied after we have offended the divine Majesty. They also have this in common, that God now has a right to demand more of us than He would have required had we not committed sin. The word more is basic to any correct understanding of penance and reparation.

But if penance and reparation have this in common, how do they differ? They differ, as we have seen, in the two different ways that we do wrong whenever we sin. Because we have failed in loving God, we now owe Him more love than He would have required had we not offended Him.

We did wrong by our willful love of self. So now we have to

make up by our selfless love of God. This is penance.

And because we have brought disorder into the world by our sins, we must undergo pain to undo this harm we have caused. This is reparation.

Why Penance and Reparation?

If we ask, why penance and reparation, the first answer is: Because God wants it.

But if we press the question: Why does God want it? Then we must say, because in His mysterious wisdom, His justice requires it. We may legitimately say, without really understanding it, that He has no choice. Having given us a free will, if we abuse liberty, we must use our freedom to repay to God the love we have stolen from Him (which is penance) and repair the damage we have done (which is reparation).

Notice, all along I have been using the first person plural, "we", because penance and reparation are owed to God not only because I have individually sinned, but because we human beings have sinned and are sinning, in our day, on a scale never before conceived in the annals of history.

We know better than Cain after he killed his brother, Abel. We are our brother's keepers. We are mysteriously co-responsible for what other people do wrong. There is a profound sense in which all of us are somehow to do penance and make reparation, not only for our sinful misdeeds, but for the sins of our country and, indeed, for the sins of the whole human race.

We return to our question: Why penance and reparation? Because, in Christ's words, "Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish".

Is it any wonder that on Pentecost Sunday, after Peter preached his sermon, and rebuked the people for their sins, and they asked him, "what must we do," his first word to the multitude was the imperative verb, "Repent!"

Is it any wonder that Our Lady of Fatima's message to a sinful

world in our day, may be summarized in the same imperative, "Do penance."

Indeed, the calamities that we have so far seen in this present century: two world wars with more casualties than in all the previous wars of history, and the threat of a nuclear holocaust that hangs over us like a tornado cloud. All of this is God's warning to do penance and reparation. Why? Because God is not mocked.

You do not offend God with impunity. You do not sin without retribution. You do not ignore the will of the Almighty and expect the Almighty to ignore what you do.

What bears emphasis, however, is that this retribution is either to be paid willingly, with our penance and reparation, or will be paid unwillingly within the divine punishment.

The divine logic is simple, awfully simple, and all we have to do is learn what God is telling us. Either we do penance and reparation because we want to, or we shall suffer (against our will) the consequences of our sins in this life, and in the life to come.

But remember, this penance and reparation is to be done not only for what we have personally done wrong. It is for all the pride and lust, for all the cruelty and greed, for all the envy and laziness and gluttony of a sin-laden human family.

God is merciful and in fact as our Holy Father has told us, Jesus Christ is the Incarnation of Divine Mercy. But God's mercy is conditional. It is conditional on our practice of penance and reparation.

How to Practice Penance and Reparation

We come to the third and, in a way, most important part of our subject: How?

I say it is the most important because we could talk for hours about the theology of penance and reparation and end up, wiser perhaps, but not holier. We must take the next and final step, and ask ourselves, practically, what am I to do about it?

In order to come to the point immediately, let me give you what I call seven rules, three for penance and four for reparation. They can be expressed in seven words, where each word is a divine command as follows:

1. Pray!
2. Share!
3. And forgive! - for penance, to make up for our failure in loving God.
4. Work!
5. Endure!
6. Deprive!
7. And sacrifice! - in reparation for the punishment that we and others have deserved for our sins.

Suppose we spend a moment on each of these seven rules, and ask Our Lord, to open our hearts to respond with generosity to His offended Sacred Heart.

Rule #1 - Pray

God expects more of us because we have sinned. And the first more that all of us can put into practice, is more prayer.

- Call it giving more time each day to prayer.
- Call it attending Mass more often.
- Call it reciting the Rosary more frequently.
- Call it being more attentive when we pray.
- Call it more fervor in our life of prayer.
- Call it getting more people to join us when we pray.
- No matter, the first rule of salutary penance is more prayer.

Rule #2 - Share

Remember what Christ told us the night before He died. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you." If all sin is a failure in loving God, and we mainly show our love for God by loving one another, then we had better show our love for others by sharing with them what God has given to us.

Again the word more comes in. We are to examine our conscience and ask ourselves, what more can I share with those whom God has placed into my life?

- Can I give more of my time to others?
- Can I share more of my knowledge with others?
- Can I share more of my skill with others?
- Can I share more of my money with others?
- Can I share more of my Catholic faith with others?

Each of us is different in this matter of sharing because each of us is living a different life with different people whom God's Providence places in our path. The second rule for the practice of penance is more sharing.

Rule #3 - Forgive

Christ could not have been more explicit in urging us to forgive others who offend us. He gave us whole parables on the subject of forgiveness. He warned us that God will be as merciful to us as we are forgiving to others. He placed, in the center of The Lord's Prayer, a frightening invocation, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Once again, it behooves us to look to our practice of forgiveness of injuries, so to be more forgiving in the future than we have been in the past.

- Can I be more forgiving by forgetting what others have done to me?
- Can I be more forgiving by ignoring the unkindness and thoughtlessness and perhaps meanness that others commit against me?

No two of us are living the same lives. Each of us have different people saying or doing or failing to say or do things that hurt us and, perhaps, crush the very heart of our souls. The third rule of penance is to be more forgiving.

Rule #4 - Work

We now shift from penance to reparation, and our first directive is to work. How is work a form of reparation of sin? It is reparation because our fallen human nature dislikes exerting itself. Work is a form of mortification that all of us can look to see whether we could not work harder than we are doing - in performance of tasks that are part of our state in life.

By nature we are prone to first do what we like, then what is useful, and finally, what is necessary.

I cannot think of a more effective kind of reparation than to set our minds to reversing that order.

We should first do what is necessary, then what is useful, and only then what is pleasant or what we like.

Rule #5 - Endure

In some ways this is the keystone of reparation, the patient endurance of the sufferings and trials that God sends us.

God in His mercy sends us the Cross in order to try our patience that we might save our souls and the souls of many others besides.

The variety of these trials sent us by God defies classification and their intensity depends on a thousand factors that differ with different people. If we are to expiate sin we must resign ourselves to endure pain. But, as we know, there are degrees and degrees to this resignation.

- Can we accept misunderstanding from others with greater peace of mind?
- Can we be more generous in doing what we know God wants us to do, although doing it is painful?
- Can we suffer without pitying ourselves?
- Can we put up with discomfort, or distaste, or disability, without becoming bitter about what we are tempted to consider injustice on the part of God?

Yes, God's violations are blessings, and the crosses He sends us are tokens of His love. But how we need the light of faith to see this, and the strength of His grace to do this -- in reparation for sin, as the price we must pay to reach heaven, where every tear will be wiped away and all the past, which is now the present, will have passed away.

Rule #6 - Deprive

Our sixth rule is to practice reparation by depriving ourselves of something we now have that we could, if we wanted to, do without.

- It may be some luxury in the home,
- Or some delicacy at table,
- Or some comfort in our way of living,
- Or some trinket, or adult toy that we could just as well do without.

Call it mortification or self-denial; whatever the name, the basic idea is to expiate for sins of self-indulgence by giving up. When we sin we offend God by choosing some creature to which

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we have no right. When we practice mortification, we make reparation by choosing to deprive ourselves of some creature we have a right to -- why, in order to undo the harm caused by sin and thus propitiate the offended justice of God.

Rule #7 - Sacrifice

I have saved sacrifice for the end because it synthesizes everything we have so far said.

- What is sacrifice? Sacrifice is the surrender of something to God.
- Sacrifice is the heart of penance and reparation.

When we sacrifice, we let go with our wills of whatever we could legitimately possess and enjoy because we want to make up to God for having stupidly chosen some creature in preference to the Creator.

We return to where we began by stressing that when we sacrifice, we do more than we would have done; we give up more than we would have given up; we surrender more of what we like in order to -- in plain English -- prove to God that we love Him.

There is an episode in the Gospels that perfectly synthesizes this cardinal mystery of sin and penitential reparation.

Remember after the Resurrection when Christ asked Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than the others do?" Why the question? Because Peter had sinned; sinned more than the others who had remained faithful to the Master. Peter was expected to love Christ more. Why more? Because he had more to sacrifice in order to expiate more because he had so deeply sinned in denying the Savior.

Conclusion

As we look into our hearts we must humbly confess that truly, we have sinned, sinned often, sinned deeply, sinned willfully.

But God is good. He gives us the privilege of not only expiating what we have done wrong, but actually becoming more pleasing to Him by our penance and reparation.

It was no pious statement that St. Paul gave us when he said, "Where sin abounded, grace has even more abounded." In other words, in God's providence, He allows us to sin so we might repent and become saints.

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Why Fast?

Exploring the Spiritual Practice of Fasting in the Catholic Tradition

Scriptural Basis for Fasting

Scripture (both in the old and new testaments) has shown that fasting done with the right reasons and attitudes, coupled with prayers and trust in the Lord can release the power of God, greatly impacting not only individuals or families but cities and even whole civilizations. In the Bible, fasting is going without food to focus on something of far greater importance. Fasting is a scriptural means chosen by God for us to humble ourselves before Him. Hence, fasting can be carried out on a personal or corporate level as shown in many biblical stories.

God's Requirement under the Old Covenant

Under the old covenant, God has ordered all Jewish people to fast for a day, which is known as the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament.

Hold a sacred assembly and, fast and present an offering made to the Lord by fire. Do no work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the Lord your God.
Leviticus 23:27-28.

Anyone who did not fast on the Day of Atonement was to be cut off from the community and was no longer a member of God's chosen people (cf. Leviticus 23:29).

Right attitudes to adopt when fasting

1. It should be done with humility and not paraded like a badge of valour
2. Fasting should go together with prayer and reading the Word of God
3. Fasting must be accompanied with repentance, turning away from sin, and forgiving others

Types of fast recorded in the bible

Primarily, there are two types of fast recorded in the bible; partial and absolute. Paul went on an absolute fast for three days following his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (*For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. Acts 9:9*).

Moses successfully embarked on a supernatural absolute fast of forty days and forty nights without food and water. (*When I went up on the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the LORD had made with you, I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water. Deuteronomy 9:9.*)

A partial fast is described in the book of Daniel where there was a three-week period in which he ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched his lips. (Daniel 10:3).

To embark on an extended fast, one must be clear of the objective of the fast, and be led by the Holy Spirit in prayer. It is advisable to obtain some spiritual direction before commencing on an extended fast, taking into consideration any known medical conditions that one might have.

Important lessons on fasting (and its power) as recounted in Biblical events

1. To honor God

She (Anna) never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Luke 2:37b.

2. To humble oneself before God and to show our repentance

Scripture taught us that by fasting, we can humble ourselves before God: *Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. Psalm 35:13.*

3. To invoke God's Intervention in a crisis

i. The humble prayers, with trust in the Lord and coupled by fasting, of King Jehoshaphat and his people turned an imminent defeat into resounding victory without Jehoshaphat and his army having to fight the enemy themselves. (cf. 2 Chronicles 20:2 onwards)

Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom.... It is already in Hazazon Tamar". Alarmed, and not knowing what to do, Jehoshaphat

resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all of Judah. 2 Chronicles 20:2-3.

ii. One of the most impactful testimonies of the power of fasting is the account of how the fast proclaimed by Queen Esther spared the Jews from being completely destroyed in the Persian Empire. A man named Haman had gained great power and position as prime minister in the Persian Empire (Book of Esther). As a result of Mordecai's (a Jew) refusal to kneel and bow to him, he hated the Jews and made plan to kill every Jew in the whole Persian Empire. He managed to make the king agree with his evil plan. It was a huge crisis for the Jewish people as they face complete annihilation at the king's order. Queen Esther (Jewish not known by her husband, the king) requested the Jews to fast.

"All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law; all alike are to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter that he may live. And I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days." And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. Then Mordecai told them to return answer to Esther, "Think not that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him. Esther 4:11-17

All the Jews in the capital city of Susa set aside three days of prayer and fasting.

Queen Esther risked her life by going to the king with her request without being summoned by the king, an act which was against the law. The three days of intense fasting and prayer undertaken by her and the whole Jewish people opened the way for her to find favor with the king. As a result, the fate of the Jews was turned around. Instead of defeat and imminent death, honor and promotion became the outcome for the Jews and their leaders, Mordecai and Queen Esther. Through their humble fasting and intense prayer to God, divine intervention was secured by them. The Jews, a people from which the Savior was to be brought forth into the world, were spared from complete extermination.

4. To invoke God's Protection

In the Old Testament (Book of Ezra), Ezra, a priest and teacher of the Law of God, had to lead a group of Jewish

exiles from Babylon back to Jerusalem. They had a difficult journey ahead of them, as they had to travel through a country occupied by their enemies. Instead of appealing to the king for protection, Ezra and his Jewish people turned humbly to God.

There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. Ezra 8:21.

So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and He answered our prayers. Ezra 8:23.

5. Petitioning God to withhold His Hand in judgment

God called Jonah, a Jewish prophet, to go to Nineveh, a gentile city and the capital of the Assyrian Empire to warn them of God's imminent judgment against them (Book of Jonah).

As a result of Jonah's warning, the Ninevites believed in God's message. *They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. Jonah 3:5.*

By the decree of the king and his nobles: *Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything, do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sack cloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Jonah 3:7-8.*

It was a complete response even involving the animals. As a result of Nineveh's repentance and fasting, it was spared God's judgment. It is important to note Nineveh's turning away from evil ways. Fasting is of not much benefit if we persist in our sinful ways. But it is immensely invaluable as a spiritual help in the repentance of our sins.

6. To prepare for Mission and obtain grace to do God's will

i. Example of Moses

Moses fasted for 40 days and nights without eating bread or drinking water as he prepared to receive the Ten Commandments from God for his people. *"Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments."* Exodus 34:28.

ii. Example of Jesus

Jesus sought to do God's will in the highest degree in carrying out His mission of salvation. Hence He began His public ministry with forty days of fasting in the desert. It is noted that Jesus, though, full of the Holy Spirit after His baptism did not immediately begin His public ministry but was led by the Spirit into the desert, where He fasted. *"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry."* Matthew 4:1-2. After the forty days in the

desert, Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit: *Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.* Luke 4:14.

Jesus also taught His disciples to fast. In the Sermon on the Mount, He said to them: *"But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting. But only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father Who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."* Matthew 6:17-18.

iii. Example of the Apostles

"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. Act 14:23.

7. To intercede for others

Nehemiah was a cup bearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes. He was saddened by the state of ruins in Jerusalem and the plight of the Jews who returned from exile. *"They said to me, 'Those who survived the exile are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.' When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven."* Nehemiah 1:3-4.

A few months after his fasting and prayer to God, he was able to secure the king's approval to go and rebuild the city of Jerusalem. On his return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah also helped to reorganize the returned Jewish exiles from Babylon.

8. For deliverance and healing

After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked Him privately, *"Why couldn't we drive it out?"* He replied, *"This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting."* Mark 9:29.

9. To discern God's will or receive revelation

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. Act 13:2.

When Paul and his companions were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit revealed to them a special apostolic ministry for two of them. After receiving this revelation, they did not send them forth immediately but only after having fasted and prayed. They fasted twice (once before receiving revelation by Holy Spirit, and another time after receiving revelation) collectively as a group before they embarked on their mission.

After Paul and Barnabas had embarked on this ministry, they continued to pray and fast as they ministered to new converts as seen below:

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Acts 14:23.

Therefore, we see that fasting was not just a single, one-off occurrence. In fact, it was practiced regularly by the apostles and taught to their new disciples.

How long should one fast?

Biblical characters fasted and sought God's help until they obtain from God what they petitioned for or until the Lord made it evident that what they requested would not be granted. (King David in 2 Samuel 12:15-23).

Various lengths of fast have been recorded in the bible:

1. One night (Daniel 6:18)
2. One day (1 Samuel 7:6, 2 Samuel 1:12; 3:35, Judges 20:26)
3. Three days and three nights (Esther 4:16, Acts 9:9, 17-19)
4. Seven days (1 Samuel 31:13, 2 Samuel 12:16-23)
5. Fourteen days (Acts 27:33-34)
6. Twenty-one days (Daniel 10:3-13)
7. Forty days:
 - i. Moses at two different times (Exodus 24:18; 34:28, Deuteronomy 9:9, 18, 25-29; 10:10)
 - ii. Elijah (1 Kings 19:8)
 - iii. Jesus (Matthew 4:2, Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2)

Facts at a glance

Important lessons on fasting (and its power) as recounted in Biblical events

1. To honor God
2. To humble oneself before God and to show our repentance
3. To invoke God's intervention in a crisis
4. To invoke God's protection
5. Petitioning God to withhold His Hand in judgment
6. To prepare for mission and obtain grace to do God's will
7. To intercede for others
8. For deliverance and healing
9. To discern God's will or receive revelation

The Catholic Church's Teachings on Fast and Abstinence

It is a traditional doctrine of Christian spirituality that a constituent part of repentance, of turning away from sin and back to God, includes some form of penance, without which the Christian is unlikely to remain on the narrow path and be saved (Jer. 18:11, 25:5; Ez. 18:30, 33:11-15; Joel 2:12; Mt. 3:2; Mt. 4:17; Acts 2:38). Christ Himself said that His disciples would fast once He had departed (Lk. 5:35). The general law of penance, therefore, is part of the law of God for man.

The Church has specified certain forms of penance, both to ensure that the Catholic will do something, as required by divine law, while making it easy for Catholics to fulfill the obligation. Thus, the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* specifies the obligations of Latin Rite Catholics [Eastern Rite Catholics have their own penitential practices as specified by the *Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches*].

Canon 1250 All Fridays through the year and the time of Lent are penitential days and times throughout the entire Church.

Canon 1251 Abstinence from eating meat or another food according to the prescriptions of the conference of bishops is to be observed on Fridays throughout the year unless they are solemnities; abstinence and fast are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and on the Friday of the Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Canon 1252 All persons who have completed their fourteenth year are bound by the law of abstinence; all adults are bound by the law of fast up to the beginning of their sixtieth year. Nevertheless, pastors and parents are to see to it that minors who are not bound by the law of fast and abstinence are educated in an authentic sense of penance.

Can. 1253 It is for the conference of bishops to determine more precisely the observance of fast and abstinence and to substitute in whole or in part for fast and abstinence other forms of penance, especially works of charity and exercises of piety.

The Church, therefore, has two forms of official penitential practices - three if the Eucharistic fast before Communion is included.

Abstinence. The law of abstinence requires a Catholic 14 years of age until death to abstain from eating meat on Fridays in honor of the Passion of Jesus on Good Friday. Meat is considered to be the flesh and organs of mammals and fowl. Moral theologians have traditionally considered this also to forbid soups or gravies made from them. Salt and freshwater species of fish, amphibians, reptiles and shellfish are permitted, as are animal-derived products such as gelatin, butter, cheese and eggs, which do not have any meat taste.

On the Fridays outside of Lent the U.S. bishops conference obtained the permission of the Holy See for Catholics in the US to substitute a penitential, or even a charitable, practice of their own choosing. Since this was not stated as binding under

pain of sin, not to do so on a single occasion would not in itself be sinful. However, since penance is a divine command, the general refusal to do penance is certainly gravely sinful. For most people the easiest way to consistently fulfill this command is the traditional one, to abstain from meat on all Fridays of the year which are not liturgical solemnities. When solemnities, such as the Annunciation, Assumption, All Saints etc. fall on a Friday, we neither abstain or fast.

During Lent abstinence from meat on Fridays is obligatory in the United States as elsewhere, and it is sinful not to observe this discipline without a serious reason (physical labor, pregnancy, sickness etc.).

Fasting The law of fasting requires a Catholic from the 18th Birthday [Canon 97] to the 59th Birthday [i.e. the beginning of the 60th year, a year which will be completed on the 60th birthday] to reduce the amount of food eaten from normal. The Church defines this as one meal a day, and two smaller meals which if added together would not exceed the main meal in quantity. Such fasting is obligatory on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. The fast is broken by eating between meals and by drinks which could be considered food (milk shakes, but not milk). Alcoholic beverages do not break the fast; however, they seem contrary to the spirit of doing penance.

Those who are excused from fast or abstinence Besides those outside the age limits, those of unsound mind, the sick, the frail, pregnant or nursing women according to need for meat or nourishment, manual laborers according to need, guests at a meal who cannot excuse themselves without giving great offense or causing enmity and other situations of moral or physical impossibility to observe the penitential discipline.

Aside from these minimum penitential requirements Catholics are encouraged to impose some personal penance on themselves at other times. It could be modeled after abstinence and fasting. A person could, for example, multiply the number of days they abstain. Some people give up meat entirely for religious motives (as opposed to those who give it up for health or other motives). Some religious orders, as a penance, never eat meat. Similarly, one could multiply the number of days that one fasted. The early Church had a practice of a Wednesday and Saturday fast. This fast could be the same as the Church's law (one main meal and two smaller ones) or stricter, even bread and water. Such freely chosen fasting could also consist in giving up something one enjoys - candy, soft drinks, smoking, that cocktail before supper, and so on. This is left to the individual.

One final consideration. Before all else we are obliged to perform the duties of our state in life. When considering stricter practices than the norm, it is prudent to discuss the matter with one's confessor or director. Any deprivation that would seriously hinder us in carrying out our work, as students, employees or parents would be contrary to the will of God.

Source: <http://www.ewtn.com/faith/lent/fast.htm> (Colin B. Donovan, STL)

Interview with Steve Zabicki

President of the
Serra International Foundation (SIF)



1. Congratulations, Steve, on your appointment as the President of the Serra International Foundation (SIF) for 2014. Can you please share with us your plans for this coming year?

Firstly, we will be launching a “public relations campaign” to increase the recognition of Serra as the global lay apostolate for vocations in the Catholic Church by highlighting the results of providing financial aid to programs throughout the world that foster and promote vocations to the ministerial priesthood and to the consecrated religious life in the Catholic Church. We hope that, through our efforts, more Catholics will pray for an increase in priestly and religious vocations throughout the world.

This campaign will be followed by the “Spring Ordination Fund Raiser”.

2. Please tell us more about the criteria and procedures for getting grants under the Foundation.

The Foundation supports seminaries, dioceses and houses of religious formation to increase vocations to the ministerial priesthood and consecrated religious life. The Foundation Policy Manual states that grants shall be determined by the Foundation Board of Trustees which conforms to the objectives and purposes of the Foundation, and to such organizations as the Foundation Board of Trustees determines fit, after review by and advice from the Serra International Board of Trustees.

3. In your opinion, how can we encourage more people to contribute financially to the Foundation?

More people will be encouraged to contribute to the Foundation this year through increased publicity of the good work that the Foundation has done. To that end, a promotion and development committee has been established to increase the awareness and support for the Foundation.

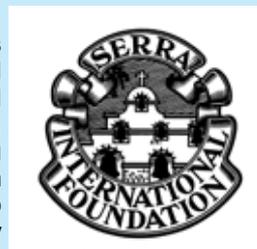
4. Who are the recipients of the grants for 2014?

Amount (US\$)	Organization	Country Impacted
\$7,850.00	Congregation of the Rosarians	India
\$8,000.00	Franciscan Sisters, T.O.R of Penance	U.S.A.
\$8,000.00	Institute of Christ the King	U.S.A.
\$10,000.00	Diocese of Juticalpa	Honduras
\$11,819.00	Holy Cross Fathers, Tiruchiraplli	India
\$14,000.00	Monks of Norcia	U.S.A.
\$14,000.00	Piarist Fathers	U.S.A.
\$15,000.00	FOCUS	U.S.A.
\$15,000.00	Franciscan Sisters of St. Anna-Lwak	Kenya
\$25,000.00	Pontifical North American College	U.S.A.
\$25,000.00	Dominican Sisters St. Catherine of Siena	Nigeria
\$25,000.00	Diocese of San Bernardino	U.S.A.

Total Grants to be dispersed in 2014: \$178,669.

Background of Serra International Foundation:

The Serra International Foundation (SIF) was founded in 1951 to assist Serra International in fulfilling its objectives of fostering and promoting vocations in the Catholic Church. Serra International is not a fundraising organization. The SIF is the fundraising arm of Serra International and its purpose is to develop the financial resources needed by Serra International.



Since its inception, the Foundation has funded a wide range of programs for the formation and training of priests and consecrated religious. The importance of the Foundation’s role has never been greater. In the last decade, more than US\$2 million has been distributed to worthy seminaries, seminarians, religious persons and vocation projects and programs. The SIF Board has a Grants Committee, which carefully examines all the Grant Applications received.

The objectives and purposes of the SIF are to:

- Fund programs that foster and promote vocations to the ministerial priesthood of the Catholic Church as a particular vocation to service
- Fund programs of formation for men and women in consecrated religious life in the Catholic Church
- Enhance the recognition of Serra International as the global lay apostolate for vocations in the Catholic Church.

Women in Serra

Brief History

Did you know that it was only in June 1986 at its International Convention in Milwaukee that Serra International voted to admit women as members after a 51-year history of being an all-male club? The motion was approved by a two-third majority with a slim margin of just four votes more than the two-third majority required to carry the motion.

Since then, many outstanding women have stepped forward to serve in the Serra apostolate for vocations all over the world at the club level. However, after 28 years, there has only been one past Serra International President who is a woman, she is Sue Cicherski who was President 2002/2003. Today, we only have one woman serving on the Serra International Board of Trustees, Janet Dell Freeman who is its current Secretary.

To honor their contributions, Serra Connects had the privilege to conduct an email interview with three of the women who are serving or who have served on the Serra International Board of Trustees. There were less than 10 women who served on the Serra International Board in 28 years.

We are also privileged to feature interviews with 13 women Serra leaders who have made an impact on the work of Serra in their respective countries. These were from 20 names recommended by the current board of trustees but only 13 responded to our interview questions. We believe that there are many more women who have made significant contributions in the Serra apostolate but due to time and space constraints, we were unable to reach out to all of them. However, we trust the Lord knows who they are, and will reward them accordingly for their love and service.

Janet Dell Freeman

**Secretary of Serra International
Board of Trustees 2013/2014**



1. Please share with us your experiences serving on the Serra International (SI) Board. What are the highest and lowest points while serving on the SI Board?

My experience serving on the Serra International Board has been positive and memorable. During my years of service beginning in 2007, I was often the lone woman on the Board. However, I was treated with respect and courtesy. Discrimination based on gender was virtually non-existent. My participation, opinions and decisions were accepted in the same manner as that of my male counterparts. There were stressful meetings in which we faced difficult problems but we worked together in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration. In the end, everything was worked out “for the good of Serra.” It is an honor to serve on the SI Board.

Highest and lowest points while serving on the SI Board of Trustees:

Highest points: The highest point was my trip to the Eternal City making a presentation to Pope Benedict XVI on behalf of the Serra International Foundation. The grant was for his private vocation activities. The Holy Father smiled, nodded and commented, “Ah, Serra International - yes, Serra”. It was a “once in a lifetime experience” and will never be forgotten.

Other high points were attending the Serra International Conventions which are faith-filled journeys that inspire us spiritually, motivate us to work more fervently, and provide opportunities for us to communicate with Serrans from far and wide.

Lowest points: A low point has been witnessing the decline of both Serra clubs and Serra membership in the United States. As our members age, we need to replace those members with younger members, which we have not been able to do.

2. What is keeping women from stepping forward to serve on the SI Board of Trustees?

It may be the case that women may not be stepping forward to serve

on the SI Board because the Board is essentially an all-male board. The number of women on the Board is not representative of the number of women in Serra. Although female membership on the Board has not been discouraged by any member, neither has it been actively encouraged or promoted. I feel it is important for a Board to be representative of the population it serves. In addition, diversity encourages broader perspectives. It is important for female Serrans to understand the opportunities, duties, time and expenses involved in being on the Board. In some instances, there is a misconception that Serra is a man’s domain and women are not welcome on the SI Board. I have never experienced that attitude.

3. The advice for women who feel called to serve on the SI Board;

Do not be intimidated by the number of male members. If invited to serve, accept the appointment! If you feel called to serve on the SI Board, do not hesitate to apply and let the Nominating Committee know about your interest.

4. What are you most passionate about in the Serra lay apostolate?

Spreading the word that Serra membership is a vocation, a call to holiness. That “more laborers for the harvest” are needed and the work of vocations is for everyone; not just Serrans. We must create new clubs where Serra does not exist and it’s imperative that we begin to attract younger members. I would like to see women invited to serve on Serra International Committees as well as on the Board. They will become familiar with the working of the Board, and will share their insight and unique qualities. Women would be especially valuable serving on Program, Membership, Vocation and Convention Committees. That experience could lead to a position on the Board.

Sue Cicherski **Serra International President 2002/2003**



1. Can you please tell us more about your experience serving as the first woman President of the Serra International (SI) Board? What were the highest and lowest points that you went through while serving on the SI Board of Trustees?

There were many high points ... beginning with the Nominating Committee announcing my name as President-Elect and realizing those members had confidence that I could represent Serra International. I am sure all the Presidents of Serra International feel a deep responsibility because you are not just representing your club, but you are now representing the goals of all Serrans. It was always a high point to visit clubs around the world; to listen, share, and encourage those clubs in their vocation promotion activities and membership projects. I still believe vocation promotion activities, at the local level, are necessary for a successful club. Highlights also included visiting many cardinals, bishops and priests who believe in and support the work of Serra International.

Low points, well I would probably say they are ongoing this day. The work of any President, and all Serrans, is to work hard to increase membership and spread the news that "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few". And remember, this begins at the local level....Your Club!

2. In your opinion, what is keeping women from stepping forward to serve on the SI Board of Trustees?

Since I became the President, there have been an increasing number of women who have stepped forward

to serve in Serra, and they have done a good job. In the United States, I believe women have not stepped forward because Serra International has not been fully experienced at the club level. Serra International serves all, beginning at the club level, all over the world. On the international level, I have met many qualified women and hope that some may soon serve on the SI Board.

3. What advice would you give to women who feel called to serve on the SI Board of Trustees?

Go forth, question, voice your opinion, and get involved.

4. What are you most passionate about in the Serra lay apostolate?

I am not sure if "passion" would be the correct word to use here, but it is certainly wonderful to meet the seminarians, whether at Holy Trinity Seminary, North American in Rome, or the Dominican Priory. Just meeting these men on their first day at a seminary and then having the opportunity to witness their ordination has to be a highlight for all Serrans.

To all Serra Clubs, I say: Get involved, meet, greet, and give support to seminarians, as well as the young women who are also committed to serving the Church.

Cindy Bell

Former Serra International Board Member



1. Can you please tell us more about your experience serving in the Serra International (SI) Board? What were the highest and lowest points that you went through while serving on the SI Board of Trustees?

Serving on the SI Board was a great privilege and responsibility. It gave me insights into how global our Catholic Church truly is. It was an opportunity to meet dedicated Serrans from around the world, and learn from each other about their programs and challenges. It is such a blessing to be able to consider so many of them as my friend! And of course, a highlight was attending a meeting in Rome and participating in an audience with our Holy Father.

The low points were the heartbreaking conflicts over the past few years. That said, however, differing perspectives are not necessarily bad all the time. They can help us think through a decision more thoroughly. The negative result comes when there is a lack of communication and respect. By listening to the Holy Spirit, I believe we are moving past some of those struggles. If we can learn from our mistakes, our beloved Serra will be stronger in the future.

2. In your opinion, what is keeping women from stepping forward to serve on the SI Board of Trustees?

Since Serra began as an organization of exclusively men, many of the leaders are still men. Also, campaigning is not advocated, so “stepping forward” might feel awkward. It is OUR responsibility as Serrans to invite and encourage members, regardless of their gender, to recognize their talents and take on new leadership roles.

3. What advice would you give to women who feel called to serve on the SI Board of Trustees?

My advice would be for them to become familiar with the mission and programs of Serra International, and learn a bit about the history of Serra International. Ask many questions and interact with a wide variety of people. Discover your own strengths and be aware of your limitations. Be willing to TRY – for the sake of Serra. Sometimes it is daunting to follow a leader who has talents we do not personally possess. But God calls each of us – at different moments in time – to share the gifts we DO have. God knows which people and what expertise Serra needs at a particular point in time.

Also, if you submit your name but are NOT selected, do not take it personally. The nominating committee has many factors to consider. Balanced representation of geographical areas, a variety of personalities and expertise are a few of those factors. Sometimes, God’s Plan involves us serving in a different role.

4. What are you most passionate about in the Serra lay apostolate?

Jesus gave Himself to us in the Eucharist.

Furthermore, He also promised to be personally present wherever two or more are gathered in His Name. Gatherings of Serra are opportunities to experience Christ’s Presence – in BOTH ways.

As a teacher, I believe affirmation is important – to encourage those discerning a vocation, and also to express appreciation to those who already are committed to serving God and His people. That kind of affirmation is also needed by fellow Serrans.

Our family involvement in Serra International was special, but not unique. My father (Jim Madigan) first attended a Serra International convention in Cleveland in the early 1960s. He became enthused about the apostolate, and learned that a children’s program was offered during the convention. After that, our family vacation each year involved attending the Serra Convention and travelling to new places. Since then, my parents missed only one or two conventions throughout their stint as Serrans! My father served as the SI president in 1976-1977, with my mother, Doris, as his loving and supportive wife and an enthusiastic travel companion. Attending the conventions as a family gave all of us a chance to learn more about our faith and to meet people from around the country, and around the world, who shared the same faith. We have all experienced the universal Church, and these friends in Serra became our extended family. Many priests and religious became special friends – due to our involvement with Serra.

My husband, Fred, was from Canada, and we met while working with an organization started by a Catholic priest from Montreal. The group did youth leadership training – primarily in Canada & the U.S. After we got married in 1977, Fred also attended the Serra International conventions. He shared our family’s respect for vocations and love of the friends in Serra. Fred’s personality and talents would have made him a wonderful leader for Serra. But running his own business was all-consuming. Besides, he also had some other major commitments. So he encouraged me to accept the various roles that were offered. I always felt we were truly a team – committed TOGETHER to the Serra apostolate.

Our two daughters, Erin and Maureen, also grew up participating in the children’s programs at the conventions. Perhaps someday, I will be able to bring my grandchildren too?

Anchan Jatukanyaprateep **Serra Club of Phitsanulok, Thailand**



1. What attracted you to serve in the Serra lay apostolate for promoting vocations, as it has been traditionally a male-dominated apostolate?

I strongly felt that God was calling me to work for the promotion of vocations when I came to know Serra. I was first introduced to Serra when the Serrans from Bangkok came to introduce Serra to us. Former SI President, Chainarong, gave us all details about Serra, whose focus is on promoting vocations to the priesthood. I was immediately attracted to serve in the Serra lay apostolate.

I am always convinced that the ministerial priesthood is the vital and key point for the Church's existence. I believe that God continues to call men to the priesthood in adequate numbers. My job, therefore, is to assist young men to discern that call and to support them once they have responded. The 'vocation shortage' has nothing to do with God's failure to call.

2. Was gender an issue at all? What were some of the challenges you faced when you first joined Serra?

One of the challenges I faced when I first joined Serra was about the confidence of lay people who are lukewarm, and do not see the pressing need to promote vocations to priesthood and religious life. Thankfully, the priests and religious are now very supportive of us, and allow Serrans to take serious ownership of the promotion of religious and priestly vocations.

3. Can you please share with us the highest and lowest points in your work of promoting vocations to the priesthood?

My highest point was when I see the ordination of new priests. It was such a joy to see another person giving up his life to serve the Lord and His Church, and his unconditional dedication to God's flock.

My lowest point in life was when there was no response from where we had tried to form new clubs or organize vocation promotion activities. They seemed to have other priorities. However, during these low moments, I came

to the realization that I did not pray enough, since without God's help, I can do nothing.

4. How do you go about encouraging and inspiring women to come forward and serve in the Serra lay apostolate? What are some of the most important qualities that women should possess in order to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood?

I usually cite the fact that there is a decline in vocations, with less and less candidates to the seminary nowadays. In some dioceses, we start to hear that there has been no new priestly ordination for several years already. There is also the worrying fall in the number of priests, and the rising of their average age. I tell them that we must do something now before our diocese starts to encounter such a problem. If we do not do it, who will?

I usually invite them to come and observe our meetings first, and subsequently invite them to join in our vocation promotion activities, attend seminars and retreats, and, of course, join us in praying for priestly vocations. I am confident that when they experience God through the above activities, they would feel God's calling like me to come and join Serra and remain active in this apostolate.

Some of the qualities that women should possess are that they love the priests and religious. They should make a commitment to pray daily for the increase of vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

We must look at the difficult situations with courage and truth. We must not lose hope. In fact we must have hope; a hope which is stronger than every fear and doubt, trusting that we will be rewarded by an abundance of priestly vocations.

Bertha Rosa Acuña Hallatt **Serra Club of Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico**



1. What attracted you to serve in the Serra lay apostolate for promoting vocations, as it has been traditionally a male-dominated apostolate?

My first encounter with Serra was in the year 1989. My husband and I participated in a Bible study group. This group was made up of approximately 12 couples. We were asked by our late Bishop Luis Reynoso to form a new Serra Club in Cuernavaca, Morelos. As you may know, in Mexico, most of the Serra apostolates are made up of both male and female members.

I believe that the participation of women in all fields is growing every day and with much respect for her gender. Women have the same capacity as men. The two genders complement each other, and they should work together for the benefit of our apostolate.

2. Was gender an issue at all? What were some of the challenges you faced when you first joined Serra?

In my case, at the beginning of our apostolate, although we were members as couples, all the male members occupied the most important positions. We were never asked to take up a position in the internal board. More than 20 years passed before a woman was elected as the President. I had a tremendous challenge to prove that a woman could have the capacity of leadership, organization, and the ability to work in the field of vocation promotion.

3. Can you please share with us the highest and lowest points in your work of promoting vocations to the priesthood?

When I was elected President, the relations with the Bishop and the Seminary had weakened. I encouraged

meetings with Bishop Alfonso Cortés to offer our time and work and to ask for his guidance with regards to our work. At the same time, I contacted the Rector of the Seminary, Father Daniel García, and in collaboration with the Diocesan Pastoral leaders, we prepared a work plan that began to give results.

We had weekly visits to the seminary, where we shared moments with the seminarians and saw their particular needs. In so doing, we forged a close relationship with the seminary and seminarians, and soon there was not an event where Serra was not invited to participate or assist in. The seminarians viewed us as their friends and shared their happy moments as well as their problems with us. We became their family.

4. How do you go about encouraging and inspiring women to come forward and serve in the Serra lay apostolate? What are some of the most important qualities that women should possess in order to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood?

I have encouraged my fellow female members, first of all, to be an example of what we can do – to give a Christian testimony and also by asking them to come forward and help out in the tasks we have set. Men give us an excellent hand but women like to be taken into consideration and be tasked to perform specific jobs individually, and not as a couple. For example, the males can help us with the annual fund raising campaigns for the seminary, but we have an excellent female accountant to manage the funds. Many a times, when seminarians have family problems, they feel more at ease to ask for counsel from us women.

Elizabeth “Betty” Shrier Serra Club of Omaha, USA



1. What attracted you to serve in the Serra lay apostolate for promoting vocations, as it has been traditionally a male-dominated apostolate? Was gender an issue at all? What were some of the challenges you faced when you first joined Serra?

I was looking for donations to help Bishop Al Novak, a former classmate and neighbor at Holy Name parish in Omaha. A friend advised me to contact a member of the Serra Club of Omaha to see if the Club would make a donation. Serran Greg Pflaum told me that Serra was not a fund-raising organization. Then he said the Serra Club was accepting women now and asked me to join. He said, “You’d be the first!”

I had been to enough meetings in my professional life as a teacher and a banker and had experienced being “first” in several positions, so I was not interested in being “first.” But out of courtesy to Greg, I accepted his invitation to be his guest at Serra’s luncheon meeting in the late summer of 1991. I could not recall what was said during the meeting, but I sensed the dedication of these men and came away knowing that I should join this group.

Throughout my first few years in Serra, I found the men to be receptive and I enjoyed working with them on various ministries. During my fourth year in Serra, a long-time Serran said, “I didn’t like the idea of accepting women in Serra.” I was surprised because he had always seemed so gracious when we visited. But then he added quickly with a bright smile, “Now I’m glad you’re here!”

The challenges I faced centered on living up to the ideals of commitment to Serra’s mission. I hoped to live up to the high standards already established by current members who eagerly accepted me as a member of the “team.” That had not been the case when I worked among some professionals in my banking career; several men – and a few women as well – either ignored my contributions or criticized my interactions with potential and current customers.

2. Can you please share with us the highest and lowest points in your work of promoting vocations to the priesthood?

In 1992, Ed Laughlin was elected by the Serra Club of Omaha Board Members to the office of President. I was surprised when he asked me if I would take down the minutes of the board meetings. At the time, I did not realize that this position of “Secretary” meant that I was a board member. I readily said, “Yes,” because I had prepared minutes for

other organizations before. Subsequently, I went through other offices in the Club and then became its President from 1995 to 1996. That was truly a high point.

The lowest point came about six years ago when I was congratulating some Serrans on being recognized in the local press for their contributions to the community. Inadvertently, I had accidentally missed one or two family members’ articles about our Serrans and they both accused me of deliberately omitting their achievements and favoring other Serrans. Besides, the Archbishop was our guest at that meeting, which made it an even more embarrassing and humiliating experience for me to face in front of the entire group. Even when I said I was sorry that I failed to see those articles, they would not accept my apology. That was a very low point.

3. How do you go about encouraging and inspiring more women to come forward and serve in the Serra lay apostolate? What are some of the most important qualities that women should possess in order to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood?

Upon learning that I was accepted into the Serra Club of Omaha, one of the members said he knew my best friend had tried to join Serra but was not accepted at a previous occasion. On my way home from that meeting, I stopped at her house and asked her if she would be the second woman to join the Serra Club of Omaha. She was delighted to learn that women were now accepted as members. Her brother was a priest and one of her sisters was a Dominican Sister. She was a natural! The club readily accepted her as well.

If I see a woman I know from her work in the parish or the community, I do not hesitate to ask if she would like to join Serra. Furthermore, I like to make new women members feel they are welcome when they join.

The qualities which women possess are:

- Dedication to the mission of the Church, the priesthood and consecrated life.
- Commitment to their own vocation by the good example they set in parish and public life.
- A willingness to serve on committees to achieve the goals of the organization.
- Their recognition of the great need of the Church to ordain men and consecrate women for the service of God.

Felisa Pulumbarit

Serra Club of Markham and Scarborough, Canada



1. What attracted you to serve in the Serra lay apostolate for promoting vocations, as it has been traditionally a male-dominated apostolate? Was gender an issue at all? What were some of the challenges you faced when you first joined Serra?

I was introduced to the Serra Club when I first attended a meeting with the Toronto Central Club in the Spring of 2008 through the invitation of Jerry Hayes, then President of their Club. I enjoyed the Mass and Homily, the fellowship lunch with the other Serrans, and the nice welcome from Mario Biscardi, who was then the Governor of Serra Canada. I noticed that there was only one other female member present, but I was truly impressed by the information I received about vocations and the support of bishops, priests and St. Augustine Seminary. I just received a retirement package from Bell Canada and I said that this is something that I can do to fill my days, not knowing that it is truly an answered prayer from the Lord. Since my early years in Canada I wanted to be involved in the life of seminarians. I shared my joy with my husband Fran during our dinner and I told him that I will join the Serra Club and will try to be there every second Tuesday of the month.

I was not bothered to be in a room dominated by male members of the Toronto Central Club at all. I was truly impressed by the work they did and the accomplishments of the organization after hearing its history and reading about it the days following my first meeting. I felt that the Lord has called me into something worthwhile – to be involved in His work through the promotion of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. I felt special to be in their midst during our meetings and I enjoyed especially the sharings of priests, religious and lay people, who were invited as guest speakers.

2. Can you please share with us the highest and lowest points in your work of promoting vocations to the priesthood?

It was in the Fall of 2009 that Mario Biscardi brought up the idea of creating a new Club for Markham and Scarborough and asked me if I could do it. A few months later, Fr. Edwin Gonsalves, Chaplain of the Toronto Central Club was transferred to be the Pastor of St. Barnabas Church in Scarborough and hence could no longer be its Chaplain. I took this opportunity to talk to Fr. Edwin to organize a Serra Club with him, and his big “YES” inspired me to start the ground work for the formation of the Serra Club of Markham – Scarborough. Our Governor Mario Biscardi worked very

hard to guide us and helped us in promoting membership for this new Club. I was so high in spirit; it was a profound feeling of gratitude to the Lord, after gathering 52 membership applications (the majority were women) from the different parishes of Markham and Scarborough. I asked Fr. Edwin Gonsalves to be our Chaplain and he offered to have our meetings at his new parish church of St. Barnabas every first Saturday of the month. We dedicated the new Club to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, what a great blessing and a great start. Through the help of our Pastor for St Patrick’s Church – Fr. Ed Murphy, we had the installation of the new Serra Club of Markham – Scarborough on 1 December 2009 at St. Patrick’s Church. This was the largest Club ever installed in the history of Serra.

The struggle to increase membership is always a challenge at every club level, but our hope in the Lord and our profound desire to work even more for vocations brought us to new heights as our Club received the 2013 Blessed Junipero Serra Award at the Serra International Convention held in June 2013 in Mallorca, Spain for a few of the vocations programs that the club organized.

3. How do you go about encouraging and inspiring more women to come forward and serve in the Serra lay apostolate? What are some of the most important qualities that women should possess in order to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood?

Since the Serra world is dominated by men, in my prayers and meditations, I resolved to change the face of Serra by inviting more women to work for vocations. I visited many parishes in Scarborough and worked in my own parish in Markham and invited many of my female friends who are already serving actively in the various ministries of their parishes, and with the help of my husband Fran, we were able to invite many members of the Knights of Columbus.

The Travelling Vocation Chalice program also gives me the opportunity to meet different families and hence promote the work of Serra to them.

Jeanette D'Souza **Serra Club of Bangalore, India**



1. What attracted you to serve in the Serra lay apostolate for promoting vocations, as it has been traditionally a male-dominated apostolate? Was gender an issue at all? What were some of the challenges you faced when you first joined Serra?

a. As a child, I lived two streets away from our Parish church and therefore, my whole family had a close and very fulfilling and joyful relationship with the Church. Men and women who serve as Priests and Religious have had a tremendous effect on me and my siblings while we were growing up including our school and university years and my younger sister joined the Franciscan Hospitalier Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (FHIC). I realized many years ago that the number of vocations to the Priesthood and Religious life was dwindling, and that this would have a detrimental effect on the generations to come. So when I heard about Serra it was the perfect opportunity for me to do something positive.

b. Promoting vocations was never about male or female domination, but simply about promoting vocations and therefore, the gender of who serves in the Serra lay apostolate was never an issue, at least in our club.

c. The challenges that we faced in India were always around explaining that we were not an entertainment club as the word "Club" in India is associated basically with entertainment and sports. We had to explain and emphasize that we work for the fostering and promotion of vocations in the Church and that besides praying for vocations, we also worked with the youth and with families.

2. Can you please share with us the highest and lowest points in your work of promoting vocations to the priesthood?

a. A high point in my work of promoting vocations came first when we met two little children at one of our presentations, who recited the Serran Prayer for vocations by heart because their parents had attended an earlier presentation of ours and began praying for vocations, with their children every day.

On another occasion, one young diocesan seminarian came up to me and said "You are the reason I joined the seminary because you came to our school and spoke to us". I was so delighted I even forgot to ask his name, but promised to pray for him to persevere.

b. The low points sadly center around when some of our members got seriously ill and there was nothing that we could do as individuals but pray for them and turn in faith to God.

We miss one of our very valuable and hard working member who was struck with Alzheimer's. The loss of my husband, our President-Elect, who was my strength and support in spite of his illness and also when one of our team members had to pull out of the Macau Convention because of serious illness. We have seen a number of calamities befall our members, particularly in the past two years, but thankfully they have overcome them and the others have rallied round and come together to work harder.

3. How do you go about encouraging and inspiring more women to come forward and serve in the Serra lay apostolate? What are some of the most important qualities that women should possess in order to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood?

a. As the Serra Bangalore President, my focus is to encourage and inspire both male and female members to serve in the Serra lay apostolate without any distinction. We currently seem to have just a few more women than men as our members. I have never considered doing anything to attract any one particular gender or discourage anyone either. Every member, male or female is precious to me.

b. Again, my personal belief is that the qualities both men and women require to be effective in promoting vocations to the Priesthood and Consecrated life, would be a respect and recognition of the contribution and commitment that these human beings make to God and to the rest of the world. It is often a thankless job, which is generally done out of love for their fellow human beings.

A large number of parents are under the belief that if a child joins the Priesthood, they will not have grandchildren and that will be the end of their progeny. They need first to understand the need for more and good vocations in the Church, and realise that they are not losing a child, but gaining a community. Their legacy is more widespread in a community than it would be with one or two individuals. Parents also need to understand that if their child receives a call from God, they have in fact been set aside with a special blessing from God and it is a privilege that only a few chosen ones are given.

Margaret Fiala

Serra Club of South Santa Clara Valley, USA



1. What attracted you to serve in the Serra lay apostolate for promoting vocations, as it has been traditionally a male-dominated apostolate? Was gender an issue at all? What were some of the challenges you faced when you first joined Serra?

My initial introduction to Serra was through the support and encouragement which our son received from Serra Club when he was in the seminary. We were not Serrans at that time, but later when we were, I was so appreciative of their continued well-wishes and concern for my son even though he had left the seminary.

Gender was not an issue for me, as I was unaware that it was traditionally a male-dominated apostolate until many years after I joined.

My husband and I were invited to a dinner with information on the Serra Club from a neighboring parish. Rather than joining on the spot, I asked for the registration information to be mailed to us. The first challenge I faced was to join the right organization; thinking I was joining the Serra Club, I accidentally joined the Sierra Club. When we finally joined the Serra club, it was in transition as new members were replacing the leadership roles mainly due to the deteriorating health of the senior members. Our club probably did not follow the traditional Serra guidelines, but we have actively supported vocations and our priests and religious.

2. Can you please share with us the highest and lowest points in your work of promoting vocations to the priesthood?

High points:

- Co-chairing the Western Region Conference 2013 in Carmel during the 300th Anniversary of Blessed Junipero Serra. Focused on Blessed Serra, vocations, and supported the needs of Bishop Richard Garcia of

Monterey Diocese for this celebration.

- The respect and support we have from the priests and the religious.
- Hosting ordination receptions, BBQ's and dinners for our bishops, priests, seminarians, and religious with fellow Serrans. It is such an honor to assist in these events.
- Opportunities for spiritual growth and the knowledge we receive from the speakers at our club meetings, along with our commitments to prayer and service.

Low points:

- The current struggles within the structure of our organization, as we all strive to keep this a viable organization true to the Serra mission.
- The difficulties faced in increasing membership, while at the same time, ensuring that the new members are of the quality that will be an asset to the Serra lay apostolate mission.
- Due to aging membership, it is always sad to hear of fellow long-time Serrans' passing or becoming incapacitated.

3. How do you go about encouraging and inspiring more women to come forward and serve in the Serra lay apostolate? What are some of the most important qualities that women should possess in order to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood?

As far as encouraging and inspiring women to serve in the Serra lay apostolate, I must admit I have not focused on gender. The most important quality for promoting vocations is prayer. We do see more women being involved with leading our clubs. Women have an inherent nurturing spirit which is an important asset to many of the activities in supporting vocations. Both women and men are a vital part of the apostolate to the Serra mission.

Kathy Hollier Serra Club of Melbourne, Australia



1. What attracted you to serve in the Serra lay apostolate for promoting vocations, as it has been traditionally a male-dominated apostolate? Was gender an issue at all? What were some of the challenges you faced when you first joined Serra?

My husband Wal was a Serran. While he was actively involved, I was content to remain in the background and help out particularly when he became Governor. When he passed away halfway through his term, I had much support from his fellow Serrans such that the following year, I joined Serra with the hope that I could continue Wal's work.

Gender was never an issue in my club. I had the challenge of becoming President of Melbourne Serra fairly early in my time with Serra, and I became the Governor of District 89 five years ago. If I have had any success in this position, it is due to the great support from all Serrans with whom I came in contact with.

2. Can you please share with us the highest and lowest points in your work of promoting vocations to the priesthood?

A high point in my work was when speaking to some seminarians they expressed their appreciation for the work and support which Serra provides. They felt that we were always there for them.

A low point is when a seminarian leaves, but we always pray that he is going on with life as a better and holier man.

3. How do you go about encouraging and inspiring more women to come forward and serve in the Serra lay apostolate? What are some of the most important qualities that women should possess in order to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood?

I always try to offer encouragement to the women I meet to join Serra. Apart from their unique position in encouraging their families (sons, daughters, brothers and sisters) to think of a vocation to religious life, they also bring to any club a strong commitment to providing practical, family-based support for the priests and religious.

Maria Gemma Sareschi Past President of Serra National Council of Italy



1. What attracted you to serve in the Serra lay apostolate for promoting vocations, as it has been traditionally a male-dominated apostolate?

I decided to serve in Serra because of the awareness that priests are humans, and as humans, they need companionship, support, and help. They are not perfect; they are sinners, just like all of us. Furthermore, our priests often live alone and have a lot of work and responsibilities entrusted to them.

2. How do you go about encouraging and inspiring women to come forward and serve in the Serra lay

apostolate? What are some of the most important qualities that women should possess in order to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood?

Women do not need to be persuaded to serve in Serra. Women are, by nature, open to the gift of life, and therefore, able to witness the beauty of love. Wives and mothers are good listeners and open to dialogue. Women today are called to serve in the Church, as their natural inclinations and traits of tenderness, generosity, and love for detail, can be put into good use.

Moira McQueen

Serra Club of Halton Region, Ontario, Canada



1. What attracted you to serve in the Serra lay apostolate for promoting vocations, as it has been traditionally a male-dominated apostolate? Was gender an issue at all? What were some of the challenges you faced when you first joined Serra?

I have always been interested in vocation awareness. As a moral theologian teaching in a theology faculty, I am in close contact with both seminarians and laypeople, and know how difficult it is these days for seminarians to complete their training. They are sometimes intimidated by the lay students' knowledge, knowing that they have to work extra hard, as well as complete their spiritual formation.

When I was asked to join Serra, (I actually belong to two clubs). I didn't even consider the past history of Serra regarding the policy of males only, since we have moved so far away from that in so many areas. It didn't even occur to me! After all, vocations are for men and women alike, so why would Serrans not come from the two sides? That simply made sense to me. Also, perhaps because of my background in law and theology, I rarely think about the gender gap in these kinds of matters, and believe in the Church's teaching of the equal personal dignity of man and woman. That now transcends any perceived or real historic divide.

What challenges remain? I believe the main challenge is to find new ways to talk about vocations. We need to think of new audiences and how to address them, whether in parishes, schools, colleges, or in the media. Motivating our own members is a challenge sometimes; there are always those who 'do', and those who wait to be asked. Leadership is a challenge! We are challenged to educate, to pray, to discern, to practise humility, patience, fortitude.... the challenges are never-ending, although welcome as strengthening our sense of purpose in being members of Serra.

2. Can you please share with us the highest and lowest points in your work of promoting vocations to the priesthood?

Because of my work I have been directly involved in helping some aspirants.

My highest point was suggesting a religious order which I thought eminently suitable for one young man who was discerning his vocation, and he followed through and tried it out. Later he became a member of that order. When we meet he always reminds me that I had pointed him in that direction. I know what I did was indirect, since I was guided by the Holy Spirit in discerning his possible suitability for that order.

My lowest point came about at one point when I felt the need to report one young seminarian after a few incidents convinced me that he did not have the qualifications necessary for the priesthood. The Rector of the seminary involved did not reply to my letter, which I had worded as charitably as possible. I was thinking of this young man's impact on the People of God. It turned out later that the priest in his first parish (before ordination) came to the same conclusion, and he was let go from seminary. This was exceptional, but a reminder that not all vocations are properly discerned and that lay people have a responsibility to hold people accountable in some way, out of concern for the person and for others to whom the person will relate as a priest of Christ.

3. How do you go about encouraging and inspiring more women to come forward and serve in the Serra lay apostolate? What are some of the most important qualities that women should possess in order to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood?

I teach theology and therefore have many opportunities to talk about the need for vocations. I do presentations mainly on bioethics in parishes, and again have the opportunity to address many audiences and remind them

of the need for vocations. When I visit Catholic schools and parishes, I urge people to support and pray for our priests, and I encourage young people to consider priestly and religious vocations. I encourage parishioners to join or support Serra, and, as a woman, I hope I set a little bit of an example in encouraging other women to join. I tell them that I am the president of my own group, and how much I enjoy it, and that, too, is encouraging. Never miss an opportunity to encourage new members!

Qualities of women as effective promoters:

I think what are necessary are love of the faith, love of the Church and church communities, experiencing a sense of belonging to the Body of Christ with the responsibility of building up that body, recognizing the interdependence of priests and religious with the laity, having an awareness of the Second Vatican Council's teachings on the

priesthood and religious life, encouraging young people to think about vocations, visibly supporting pastors in a diocese so that young people realize there is a support system and that priests do not have to be isolated, demonstrating leadership, speaking out about the need for vocations, showing concern for our neighbors, and highlighting the positive aspects of people in showing them where they can contribute and in supporting them when they do. It is so important to help people realize they have gifts and talents, and to encourage them to use them – we should always stress the power of the group as well as respect every member's individuality. These apply to men, too, of course!

Overall, as His Holiness Pope Francis exhorts us: Do everything with joy – the joy of the Gospel!

Maria Das Graças Silva Britto

Serra Club of Petropolis, Brazil



1. What attracted you to serve in the Serra lay apostolate for promoting vocations, as it has been traditionally a male-dominated apostolate? Was gender an issue at all? What were some of the challenges you faced when you first joined Serra?

Praying for vocations and seeing the fruits of perseverance, which is the ordination of seminarians to the priesthood have attracted and sustained me in the Serra lay apostolate for promoting vocations.

The Serra Clubs in my Region comprise mainly of women. I always serve with love and with joy the mission that God has entrusted to me.

Some challenges that I face include public speaking, the lack of knowledge and access to new computer technologies. To help me overcome my lack of computer knowledge, my son bought me a computer so that I could learn to serve Serra and the Church better.

2. Can you please share with us the highest and lowest points in your work of promoting vocations to the priesthood?

High points:

- To be able to take part in many ordinations

- The joy that I experience when I see so many people praying for vocations
- The perseverance of all – Serrans and seminarians

Low points:

- Having to deal with the disengagement of some Serrans who fail to fulfill their responsibilities, as well as those who constantly miss deadlines

3. How do you go about encouraging and inspiring women to come forward and serve in the Serra lay apostolate? What are some of the most important qualities that women should possess in order to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood?

I try to lead by example, making sure that my actions are consistent with what I preach. That is not easy. I always pray to Our Lady for guidance on how she would like me to act.

Qualities that women should possess in order to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood include mercy, frequent participation and reception of the sacraments, responsibility, and a deep love for the Serra apostolate as well as the priesthood.

Norma Swanson
Serra Club of North-Minneapolis, USA



1. What attracted you to serve in the Serra lay apostolate for promoting vocations, as it has been traditionally a male-dominated apostolate?

To be honest, I had never heard of Serra prior to my invitation to come to a lunch with my business partner. It seems the vote to allow women members had just been passed at the last convention and my childhood pastor, Msgr. Patrick Coates, the Club Chaplain, had been at that convention. It was his idea to have my business partner invite me to come for a visit. I visited twice, hearing outstanding speakers, learning about the Serra mission, and then I was asked to join. I was unaware of the fact that I was the first woman to become a member and was shocked to hear later that one member left because a woman was allowed to join. Once I heard about that unfortunate happening, I was determined to make sure I became an asset, rather than a liability to the club. I read the Membership Manual from top to bottom and prayed a fervent prayer to God that He would not allow me to become the “token” woman in Serra. I was formally installed on 20 November 1986 as member number 7086.

I can't say I experienced any challenges; rather I was graciously received and welcomed by my own Club and the other Clubs in District 7 of Region 8. One small problem was an annual retreat the Club went on – at an all-male Retreat House – a minor detail that was quickly remedied. Now we have our Annual Region 8 and District Convention at Christ the King Retreat House which has facilities for both genders.

2. Can you please share with us the highest and lowest points in your work of promoting vocations to the priesthood?

There have been so many high points; it will be hard to mention them all. One of the most outstanding high points was attending the Serra International Conventions, where I met wonderful people from all over the world dedicated to promoting and affirming vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life as we were. Up till recently, I tried to attend every Convention. When Minnesota hosted the Convention in 1996, Mike Pohlan asked me to serve on the planning committee and, under his direction, we put on an outstanding and unforgettable Convention.

The “international” part of Serra became another highlight when I visited my godchild in Sydney, Australia. I asked for permission to visit a Club there and they responded by asking me to be the guest speaker at their meeting. It was wonderful to see, firsthand, how they were doing the same things we were doing to promote vocations. They shared some of the materials they used and I sent each member of their Club a cloisonné Serra pin which they had never seen. It was a most rewarding experience.

A huge highlight was when I was asked to be District Governor in 1997 and thus became the first female District Governor in Region 8. It was an honor to visit each of the Bishops in our Region to offer the help of Serrans in whatever vocation promotion efforts he wanted publicized and to get approval of what we were doing in those we were already active in. It was during that time, when, once again, I was praying for the grace to be a good leader, that it was made clear to me that

“As Mother Teresa said, “When life is most demanding and you give cheerfully in spite of that; that is love at its best.”

‘word of mouth’ instructions from one District Governor to another was cumbersome and sometimes confusing, so I wrote down everything I was hearing and came up with a District Policy Manual for my own benefit. It was sent to all Past District Governors for their input and to confirm its accuracy. They liked it and it was formally adopted in our District in November of 2005.

One of the low points in my work of promoting vocations has been the difficulty of getting parish priests to accept and support the work we do at the parish level. Our Club’s newly formed Parish Vocation Advocate program is working to change that. These are Serran volunteers from our Club, who offer to work in a parish where there is no active Serran and where they, themselves, are not parishioners to make vocation awareness news and projects available to the parish. With the permission of the pastors, we use posters, vocation prayers, rosaries for vocations, bulletin bits and any other means we can to keep vocation awareness a part of the Church experience in these parishes. It’s a new project but it is taking off. I believe the priests are also experiencing a change of heart as they see results of our efforts and the younger priests seem to be more familiar with Serra now.

3. How do you go about encouraging and inspiring more women to come forward and serve in the Serra lay apostolate? What are some of the most important qualities that women should possess in order to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood?

My best suggestions to being a successful Serran, and in so doing, attract more women to join us are:

- Be enthusiastic: Ours is a work of love, an opportunity

to serve the Church in a very concrete way.

- Be proud of Serra and what it stands for: Wear your pin and encourage all members to do so. Only when you know Serra can you understand the privilege you have of being “called to be a Serran” and then, once you do understand it, you will be eager to invite others to share in that privilege.
- Mount your Certificate of Membership in an obvious place to encourage others to ask, “What is Serra?”
- Invite someone to attend ceremonies or liturgies of orders at the Seminary, ordinations of priests, and Bishops and professions of religious orders and then follow up with an invitation to a Serra meeting.

A woman should possess the following qualities to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood:

- She should have a deep love for the Church, the Priesthood and Consecrated lifestyles.

She should also be:

- Prayerful
- A woman of her word
- Dependable and willing to be involved.
- Giving

As Mother Teresa said, “When life is most demanding and you give cheerfully in spite of that; that is love at its best.”

Oradida Medeiros

Serra Club of Pelotas, Brazil



1. What attracted you to serve in the Serra lay apostolate for promoting vocations, as it has been traditionally a male-dominated apostolate? Was gender an issue at all? What were some of the challenges you faced when you first joined Serra?

I would say, it was the seriousness of Serra Club's mission, missionary zeal, determination and desire to encourage and pray for priestly vocations, religious and missionaries, without neglecting our own vocation, which attracted me to serve in Serra. It is also fortunate that the men in Serra Club also respect and love female members.

Gender was not an issue. On the contrary, I felt a strong sense of ownership and commitment by everyone, whether men or women in Serra, which is very empowering for all members.

Some of the challenges are the need to be objective and professional, yet charitable and Christ-like in the way we communicate with each other, to do everything in the light of what God is calling us to do, amidst the diversity of opinions in the Club.

2. Can you please share with us the highest and lowest points in your work of promoting vocations to the priesthood?

The high point of being in Serra, I would say, is the knowledge that you belong to a large organization with its own guidelines and well-defined structure which very much help the work of promoting priestly and religious vocations to move forward.

As for the lowest point in my work, I would consider it the struggle to reach out more effectively to the youths in our work of promoting priestly and religious vocations. At times, we feel powerless. But we do what we can, accepting our own limitations.

3. How do you go about encouraging and inspiring women to come forward and serve in the Serra lay apostolate? What are some of the most important qualities that women should possess in order to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood?

I already took the first step by inviting and preparing women to assume leadership positions on both the national and international boards. However, I think Serra work is for both men and women, not just women. What we really need are members who have a deep commitment to serve faithfully with their God-given talents in this Divine mission.

As for the qualities that women Serrans should possess, I believe she has to ensure that she commands respect by all, through the way she carries herself, taking special care such as dressing up properly like an executive woman would, as well as having clarity, precision, talent, sympathy, empathy, love, respect, friendship and a true spirituality, showing leadership with professionalism with the light of the Gospel as her guide.

Theresa Elumelu Serra Club of Ibadan, Nigeria



1. What attracted you to serve in the Serra lay apostolate for promoting vocations, as it has been traditionally a male-dominated apostolate? Was gender an issue at all? What were some of the challenges you faced when you first joined Serra?

I was introduced to Serra in 1999 by a male member of the Serra Club of Ibadan, and I attended one of their meetings. After learning about the aims and objectives of Serra, I decided to join and since then there has been no turning back for me. Joining Serra Club was one of the greatest things that ever happened to me as a Catholic. And I have never regretted being a member of Serra. Serving in Serra provides the opportunity for me to mind “my father’s business”. “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.” (Matthew 9:37-38.)

It is extremely refreshing and rewarding to be working in God’s business. Serra Club is a great asset to the Church in its efforts in promoting vocations, serving a very great need of the Church. Where would the Church be without priests? We all know and agree that for the Eucharistic celebration, we absolutely need a priest. The ministerial priesthood is a guarantee of the sacramental presence of Christ, our Redeemer. Serra Club is, therefore, doing a very important work by promoting vocations to the priesthood, and as lay faithful, we are important stakeholders.

Being a member of Serra Club has also helped me in my personal spiritual growth and gave me much spiritual fulfillment.

In this part of the world we join Serra basically because of its well-defined objectives and had never been conscious of differences in gender. The clubs in our district have always had women presidents who have always done well, of course, with the support of all Serrans; male and female.

2. Can you please share with us the highest and lowest points in your work of promoting vocations to the priesthood?

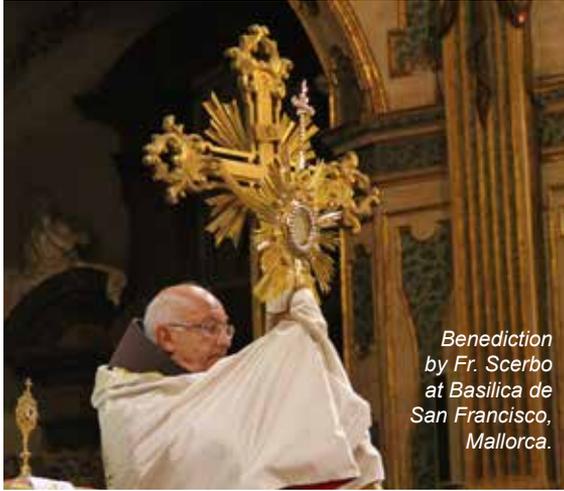
My joy knows no bound when I come across young boys in minor seminaries who exhibit genuine interest in going to the Major Seminaries and eventually seeing them ordained as priests. Witnessing the priestly ordinations forms one of my highest points in my work of promoting vocations to the priesthood. This usually constitutes my high point and I am usually looking forward to the next ordination.

I feel very low when some seminarians are asked to withdraw for one reason or another, and nothing can be done about it.

3. How do you go about encouraging and inspiring more women to come forward and serve in the Serra lay apostolate? What are some of the most important qualities that women should possess in order to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood?

Women are invaluable members of any society; they make things happen. The most important qualities that women should possess in order to be effective promoters of vocations to the priesthood are that they are committed Catholics, who are well-grounded in the faith and actively living out their faith. And more importantly, they must be women who have regular prayer lives.

What I do is to look out for women Catholics with the above qualities to join our ministry in serving God, by inviting them to Serra Club meetings as observers. Brochures about Serra and its objectives are distributed and I usually explain to them the spiritual benefit they stand to gain by becoming a Serran. I also let women understand that apart from spiritual growth, being a member of Serra club also helps to enhance their leadership qualities, even in the secular world.



*Benediction
by Fr. Scerbo
at Basilica de
San Francisco,
Mallorca.*

Called to Serve

Rev. Fr. Joe Scerbo, S.A.

I was sitting near Jesus being taught by His Word. My playmates were also gathered around. Suddenly, I awoke from the dream and called out to my parents, who were playing pinochle with my godparents in the next room. “Mommy! Daddy! Jesus wants me to be a priest!” “Not my son,” my father replied. The smoke from his cigarette curled up toward the ceiling and faded into the air, and the game went on. I was eight years old.

My father was born in Calabria, Italy. In all his life, he had never had close contact with a priest. He worried about me, and thought I would not have a normal life. In some ways, he was right. In other ways, he was very wrong. This is my story.

God calls us in various ways. He dispenses His graces according to the mode of the receiver: I am a strong extrovert, and so God called me through people. Was that dream influenced by someone placing the idea in my mind? I don’t know, exactly. Yet I do know that same year, when I was eight years old, I experienced my first conscious “touchstone” in my life. It is a day I have always remembered. God sent a woman who was consecrated to the Lord. Her name was Sister Alexis Joseph. She was a young Franciscan Sister of the Atonement in her early twenties. All my eight-year-old senses were activated in this first encounter. I can still smell the tile on the shabby convent floor where I met Sister Alexis Joseph. The wind was blowing through the window and the lace curtains gently moved with the breeze. Sister Alexis Joseph’s face exuded a love for life and a love for God. As I came to know her, she would hand me book after book on the lives of the saints: St. Isaac Jogues, St. John Brebeuf, St. Francis, Dorothy Day ... so many, young and old,

who did some extraordinary work for God! I wanted to do the same. Through them, my desire was born.

Growing up in New York State, I lived close to the Shrine of the Jesuit Martyrs. Sister Alexis Joseph would take us kids to visit the place where St. Isaac Jogues was martyred in the Mohawk Village of Ossernenon. This was also where Kateri Tekakwitha, the first Native American saint, lived. I remember the deep feelings I experienced as I walked up the hill from the Mohawk River. This hill was marked with a row of evergreens in the shape of a cross, to remind us this was where the Jesuit martyrs and the Christian Huron Indians were tortured by means of the gauntlet. A boy needs role models to imitate. In my youth, I would often return to the ravine where St. Isaac Jogues was tomahawked because these martyrs were among my role models. The ravine was so silent. In that silence, I felt God’s peace. Silence reminds us we are on a journey. Silence guards the fire within. Silence enables us to speak a word. Even children can encounter Christ in silence.

There are also role models in the world at large. Reading the newspaper, I found a favorite: the “Prince Valiant” column. I loved reading about Prince Valiant. After all, he had the ear of the King. The King would send him on missions: to slay a dragon, protect a poor widow, or bring peace to villages far and wide. Yes, this is what I wanted to do! An adventure, indeed!

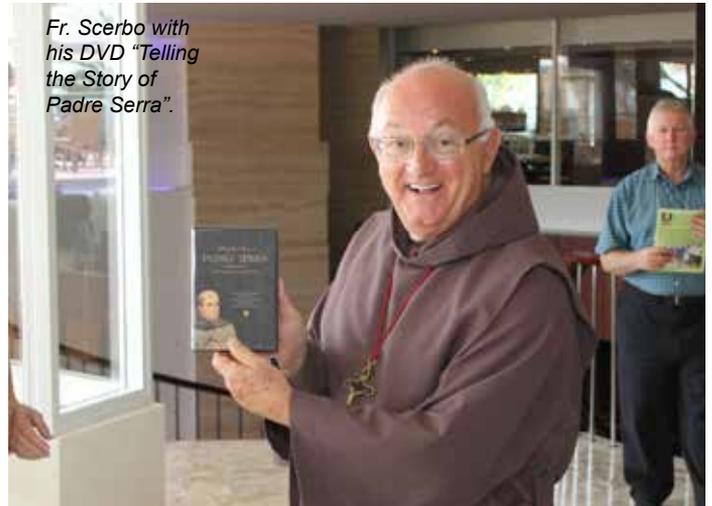
As an altar boy, Sister Alexis Joseph took a group of us (we were called the “Knights of the Altar” back then) to visit the homebound in our little parish community. We met a blind woman, and she sought me out. Though I wasn’t

“ I wanted to do something great with my life. My father wanted me to be a doctor. I told him I did, too: a doctor of souls. ”

the boy standing closest to her, she reached over to me and placed her hand on my arm. She then prophesized I would someday be ordained a Roman Catholic priest. I didn't think much about that experience at the time, yet somehow the memory flooded back to me on 30 May 1970, when Bishop Pernicone of Newburgh, New York ordained me to the priesthood.

There is yet another moment in my youth, of which I still feel uneasy to talk about. I was 11 years old. My family lived in a rental unit on the second floor of a house. The home was on the side of a hill, steep enough to ride a sled down in the winter. One sunny winter morning, I went outside on the porch, and looked up to the side of the hill where I set up forts of evergreen Christmas trees so my pals and I could stage snowball battles in and out of our forts. The sky was so blue. Suddenly, I saw a frightening, magnificent image of Christ the King in the sky. The visual was technicolor. Christ wore a crown, and appeared to be holding the planet on which I stood. From the horizon, through the wide expansion of the blue sky, I saw His heart and love for the world. The entire planet was in His hands. Terrified, I ran back into the house, dove onto my bed, and covered my head with a blanket! As a priest devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus today, this image comes back to me often. I continue to seek an understanding of Christ's Kingship and His Divine Will.

Mothers and fathers may not realize that children can see Christ so clearly. He was very present to me in my youth, not just in these personal encounters I have shared, but in the warmth of the community in which I was raised. I graduated from high school with leadership and academic honors. I was the captain of the cross-country



team and king of the Prom. Prestigious universities were offering me scholarships. Yet something still tugged at my heart. I felt I had been given so much, and I wanted to give something back. I wanted to do something great with my life. My father wanted me to be a doctor. I told him I did, too: a doctor of souls.

It has been an adventure, a life riding the edge of a wave, with Jesus as my guide.

About Rev. Fr. Joe Scerbo, S.A.

Fr. Joe Scerbo, S.A. is a Franciscan Friar of the Atonement, a Golden Jubilarian and pastoral associate at St. Paschal Baylon Catholic Church in Thousand Oaks for the past several years.

In 1961, Fr. Joe received his Franciscan habit with the Religious name of "Juniper" after the Blessed Junipero Serra, the Father Founder of California and first pastor to the West (USA).

Since that time Fr. Joe has grown in his awareness of his Religious namesake and with James Kelty co-produced a five episode EWTN docudrama "Ever Forward, Never Back" featuring the life and legacy of Padre Serra.

Fr. Joe has served as Academic Dean of Trinity College of Graduate Studies in Anaheim for 17 years. He has also served as past President of the Association of Christian Therapists International.

He is the author of "Fire in the Night" the story of Fr. Paul of Graymoor, a pioneer for Christian Unity.

**University of Saint Mary of the Lake
(Mundelein Seminary)
Mundelein, Illinois, USA
Rev. Fr. James Presta
Vice Rector for Seminary Administration**



1. What is the general background of the seminarians enrolled at your Seminary?

About one-third of our seminarians come from college seminary backgrounds. Many of our seminarians were working in the business world before entering the seminary. We have one seminarian who is a Medical Doctor and a number of seminarians who have law degrees.

2. Could you share some insights on what you find are the most common struggles among your seminarians and how does seminary formation help them overcome these struggles?

Many of our seminarians struggle with the fact that their families or friends back home do not always support them in their priestly vocation. We try and teach them ways to stay happy and healthy by finding support groups within their own dioceses. We encourage prayer/ support groups among brother priests. While they are here in the seminary, we have one day a week called Diocesan Night that gives the seminarians from a given diocese the opportunity to pray and eat together as brother seminarians. Our hope is that this sense of fraternity and brotherhood among seminarians will continue when they become priests.



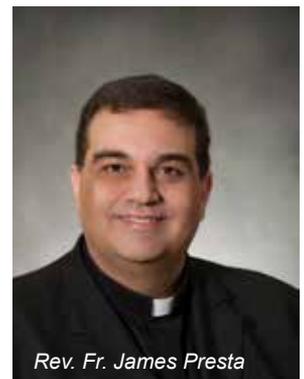
3. Priests face many challenges in their pastoral ministry especially in today's increased secularism that pervades even Catholic families. How is your Seminary preparing the seminarians to face these challenges when they are ordained to the priesthood?

Within our class formation programs, we have a number of conferences which deal with these types of questions. In addition, our Moral Theology Department handles many of these difficult and complex issues in the classroom. Mundelein Seminary has created an atmosphere that lends itself to dealing with these questions in an open and honest manner.

4. What advice would you give young men today, who are considering the priesthood but are afraid to make a commitment to apply to a seminary? And what are some of the characteristics or signs that could indicate that a young man may have a vocation to the priesthood?

One piece of advice is to encourage young men to seek advice from a priest. If they have a rapport with their parish priest, he is the ideal person to speak with regarding a priestly vocation.

There are many characteristics or signs of a young man who has a vocation to the priesthood. Here are two: the first is that the man would be active in his prayer life, which includes regular attendance at Mass. The second sign or characteristic would be a person who is active in a parish, generous with his time and talent, and enjoys being of service to others.



*Number of Seminarians: 192
Average Age of Seminarians: 30*

Rev. Fr. James Presta

Fundraising for Serra International Typhoon Haiyan Relief Fund

In early November 2013, Typhoon Haiyan swept through South-East Asia, leaving a deadly trail of destruction in parts of Vietnam, Southern China, and the Philippines; the worst-hit country being the Philippines. This is the strongest and deadliest typhoon in the history of Philippines, wiping out entire towns and villages, and claiming over 6,000 lives. More than a million homes have been damaged, approximately 50% of which are completely destroyed. Recent reports indicate that out of the 16 million people affected, 3.9 million have been displaced.

In response to this natural and humanitarian disaster, Serra International launched a fundraising campaign in January 2014 to aid the priests and seminarians in rebuilding the Sacred Heart Seminary in Palo, Leyte in the Philippines which sustained extensive damages in the wake of the typhoon.

With the grace of God, a total of US\$19,390.19 has been collected from generous Serrans all over the world. Although it is a modest amount, many drops do make an ocean. All the funds collected has been remitted directly to His Eminence Luis Cardinal Tagle, the Archbishop of Manila, who will help disburse the money to the affected priests for use in the reconstruction of the Sacred Heart Seminary in Palo, Leyte, the Philippines.

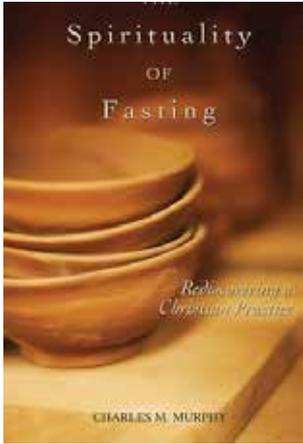
Our Lord said, "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). Furthermore, "whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed." (Proverbs 19:17). Let us always keep in mind that it is the Lord Himself whom we are helping, and that God, who is generous to the extent of dying on the Cross for us in remission of our sins, will reward us for every good deed that we perform with love, with sincere hearts, and with pure intentions.

Once again, on behalf of the Serra International Board of Trustees 2013/2014, I would like to thank each and every one of you for your kind generosity and your prayers in support of this fundraising effort.

May God bless and reward you!

Mary, Mother of Vocations, pray for us!

Sean Yeo
President
Serra International Board of Trustees 2013/2014



The Spirituality of Fasting: Rediscovering a Christian Practice

By Msgr. Charles M. Murphy

Paperback: 128 pages
Publisher: Ave Maria Press (18 January 2010)
Available on Amazon

Review of the book below is extracted from Our Sunday Visitor

How fasting fuels spiritual growth, charity

The ancient practice has fallen out of fashion among Catholics, but it helps us detach from the material world and creates an empty space for God to fill.

Fasting and abstinence were once staples of Catholic life. There was a time not so long ago when you could spot Catholics in a restaurant simply by looking at what was on their plates on a Wednesday or Friday.

But with changes in Church rules and individual mindsets, fasting slowly began to fall out of fashion. Today, in popular Catholic culture at least, fasting is often considered a quaint practice of days gone by, something that pales in comparison to doing charitable works.

And yet fasting is one of the three pillars of Lent, equal to prayer and almsgiving in the trilogy of practices for the season.

Why is fasting so important? Because learning to do without, especially when the sacrifice is made on behalf of another, helps to free our bodies and spirits from the worldly desires that threaten to pull us off our spiritual path.

Undercurrent of prayer

In fasting, we open up a space, both literally and figuratively, and allow God to squeeze in among all the other things that lay claim to our attention.

“Food is an obsession in our culture, and I really think we need wisdom from the Church about eating,” Msgr. Charles M. Murphy, author of “The Spirituality of Fasting: Rediscovering a Christian Practice”, told Our Sunday Visitor (OSV). “It’s a basic human activity, and there is wisdom in this whole tradition of fasting, which is focused on God and not on ourselves.”

Msgr. Murphy said it’s important to distinguish fasting from dieting and medically supervised programs because fasting is not about fitness or “right eating” or ecology. Just as almsgiving without prayer is simply philanthropy, fasting without prayer is simply a strict diet. Prayer must be the undercurrent that supports fasting or it becomes one more self-centered act designed to make us more appealing according to worldly standards, not godly standards. Fasting is first and foremost an act of humility before God.

“It’s creating an empty space for God to fill. It’s also penitential; it’s an expression of our desire to be converted from sin and selfishness and to remove the effects of sin in our life,” said Msgr. Murphy, explaining that there are two forms of fasting: total and partial. A total fast is eating nothing and drinking nothing for a designated period of time. A partial fast involves giving up specific things for a specific period of time “to undo the effects of sinful patterns, habits, and mindlessness that may have inundated our lives.”

Doing without

Lackadaisical Catholic fasting practices in the United States is something that Pope John Paul II brought to Msgr. Murphy’s attention years ago. The pope came to visit students at North American College in Rome, where Msgr. Murphy was then rector, during Lent in 1980. The Vatican had called ahead to say that the pope would want nothing more than soup and bread for lunch, something Msgr. Murphy recalls as setting a good example for his seminarians.

“During the meal he turned to me and said, ‘I have just come back from the States, and fasting and abstinence have collapsed. What happened to it?’ I really didn’t know what to say. My book is a response to his question,” Msgr. Murphy told OSV.

“Prayer, fasting and charity are the three great pillars of Jewish and Christian piety, and they’re all indispensable. You can’t say, ‘I’m going to do charity and therefore I don’t have to fast.’ Prayer, fasting and charity are the three pillars, and Jesus incorporated them into his Sermon on the Mount, as well as the beatitudes. And he gave them a new status and a higher motivation, so it’s at the heart of the Christian message,” he explained, quoting St. Augustine, who said that prayer and fasting are the “two wings” of charity.

“Charity really can’t take off — we can’t practice the great commandment to love God and neighbor — unless we’re praying and fasting.”

About the author

Monsignor Charles M. Murphy is currently the director of the permanent diaconate for the Diocese of Portland, Maine. He is the author of a number of scholarly articles and several books, including *The Spirituality of Fasting*, *At Home on the Earth*, *Wallace Stevens: A Spiritual Poet in a Secular Age*, *Eucharistic Adoration and Belonging to God*.

Monsignor Murphy is the former academic dean and rector of the Pontifical North American College in Rome and served as part of the editorial group working in Italy under Cardinal Ratzinger on the third draft of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which became the fourth and final version. He currently serves as consultant to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops committee on catechetics, reviewing materials for conformity with the Catechism. He served as chair of the editorial committee that produced the pastoral letter on environmental issues by the Bishops of the Boston Province and he served as a consultant to the USCCB for their statement on global warming. He has been the pastor of four parishes in Maine and has served his diocese in ecumenical and educational capacities. Monsignor Murphy holds a doctorate in sacred theology from the Gregorian University, a master’s degree in education from Harvard University, and a bachelor’s degree in classics from the College of the Holy Cross.