



“... grant we beseech Thee,  
an increase of laborers for Your Church...”

— from the Serran prayer for vocations

Summer 2026

## HEEDING THE CALL

A publication of the Serra Club of St. Clair County, Illinois • Affiliated with Serra International

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St. John the Evangelist Church, Indianapolis, Indiana

## Encountering Christ at Serra's 83rd International Convention

The convention was held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Indianapolis Indiana from July 9-13, 2026.

The conference started with Mass at St. John the Evangelist Church, about ½ block from the hotel. The chief celebrant was Archbishop Charles C, Thompson. An interesting fact we found out later was that when Archbishop Thompson went to Bishop Bootcamp in Rome after his Episcopal Ordination, Cardinal (then Bishop) Collins was one of the leaders. Cardinal Collins is the Episcopal advisor to Rome for Serra International.

St. John is the oldest Catholic church in Indianapolis. Eucharistic Adoration was held here 24/7 during the Eucharistic Congress. I was told it was standing room only at all times. The traveler's mass was held here on Saturday night as well.

Eucharistic Adoration opened at the hotel following mass. A welcome dinner was held at the hotel giving the attendees a chance for meet and greet prior to the start of the main events on Friday. The hospitality suite opened following dinner.

Friday was jam-packed with excellent speakers, most local to the Indianapolis area.



Mark Yacovelli

Following morning prayer, the keynote speaker was **Mark Yacovelli** of The Hearth: Real Stories by Regular Folks, a registered non-profit that assists cities and service-based agencies deepen relationships, address injustices, and cultivates compassion. The talk was titled “To Tell the Story of Serra.” Mark advised us, through his own stories, how to use our own Serra stories to communicate our mission and vision to new members and to encourage vocations.

Following Mark, **Sr. Joni Luna**, a Sister of Providence from St. Mary of the Woods in Terra Haute talked to us about Creating Pathways to Discernment. An interesting fact she brought up was that there was a huge boom in vocations following World War II. Prior to that the congregation had 1–2 novices per year the same rate as they see now.

She attributed that to the women who had active roles outside the home during the war looking for alternatives to homemaking upon the return on the men to their prior workforce roles.



Sr. Joni Luna

Sr. Joni uses a variety of on-line meeting formats to engage with discerners, accompanied with come-and-sees at the campus in Terre Haute. One of her current discerners gave a very enlightening talk about how difficult discernment is and how she chose St. Mary of the Woods through a service that matches women to religious orders through their charisms and interests.

Next the President of the Serra International Foundation, **Cindy Bell**, talked about the Foundation’s 75th anniversary this year and this year’s grant recipients. The Foundation has been re-invigorated with the hiring of a permanent full-time director of

development, Paul Slomski. It continues to support worthy causes in both the US and other countries. It always has many more requests than it can fulfill. Thanks to the generosity of its donors, The Serra International Foundation in 2026 awarded 27 vocation grants totaling \$89,650 to support seminarians, religious, and vocation programs around the world.



Cindy Bell



Fr. Jeffery Dufresne

After lunch, **Fr. Jeffery Dufresne** spoke about fostering vocations in the Hispanic community. He has spent many years working in the Hispanic community of Indianapolis. Some interesting differences exist within the Hispanic communities.

There is a culture that says “I’m not worthy to receive communion.” There is a very large percentage of people at masses who don’t come forward to receive the Eucharist. Many don’t have their children baptized or catechized until later milestones, particularly the request for a quinceañera mass for a girl turning 15 may prompt catechesis in preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation. Boys likewise think themselves unworthy of a vocation to the priesthood. Fr. Jeffery tends to address this more indirectly. Instead of asking them to consider the priesthood, he will point out the qualities they possess and then tell them that would make them a good priest. This is an approach I think is worth considering for all young men and women to encourage discernment to the priesthood or religious life.



Rev. Michael Keucher

Very **Rev. Michael Keucher** then spoke about the Effect of the National Eucharistic Congress on Vocations. The gist of the talk is that it is really too soon to tell. Young people today tend to value experiences over things, so we see great attendance at events

like World Youth Day, Seek Conferences. So we need to examine our discernment programs in light of this preference.



Fr. John Hollowell

And lastly **Fr. John Hollowell** gave an inspirational talk about his own story of healing from a brain tumor through giving up his suffering to those victimized by clerical sexual abuse and his subsequent healing through a pilgrimage to Lourdes. His healing is

under investigation by the church.

Mass followed this last speaker of the day.

On Saturday, following the Global Rosary, Fr. Eric Augenstein, Vice-President of the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors (NCDVD), presented historical data on the level of participation and belief in religion by generation.

Some notable statistics:

- The Christian share of the US population appears to have stabilized after years of decline.
- 30–40% of young people have no religious affiliation.
- Of the 30 million Catholics in the US, 18 million attend mass regularly (defined as 3 or more times per month.)

The address of the study is: [www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/](http://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/). Religious Landscape Study (RLS) | Pew Research Center.



Club members Marvin (Eva) Winkeler, Brenda Bishop and Steve Kappel joined the St. Louis club for dinner "on our own" on Friday evening of the Convention.

### Other Saturday events:

- Emanuel Costa, Out-going President of Serra International, presented a PowerPoint of all the Serra Clubs he visited during his tenure.
- Council Reports from Serra countries around the world.
- Breakout sessions for Programs, Vocation, Foundation, Membership and Communication.
- The Delegates meeting
- Mass with the Installation of new Serra International officers
- The annual banquet with awards presentations.



**Top photo:** (seated) Lou Kappel and Mike Kappel. Standing (l to r): Marvin Winkeler, seminarians Grant Fender and Kyle Kellerman, Jim Wachtel, Cynthia Chaney, Mark Pluff, Fr. Levi James, Julie Pluff, Janet Hadley, Jeanne Haar, Bonnie Levin and Fr. Thomas Lugge.

**Right, top:** Grant Fender, Marvin Winkeler and Lou Kappel enjoying the bread.

**Right Bottom:** Fr. Levi James, Kyle Kellerman and Cynthia Chaney are pleased with their meals.



## Serrans Visit with Kenrick Seminarians of Belleville

To show support for our seminarians studying at Kenrick Seminary, the club hosted dinner at Favazza's in St. Louis on March 23, 2026, for the students and also our Vocation Directors. In attendance were Kyle Kellerman and Grant Fender along with Fr. Thomas Lugge and Fr. James Levi. 10 representatives of the club traveled to St. Louis to engage in the fellowship and food and had the chance to get better acquainted with our seminary students studying in the area.

## Letter from our President – Andrea Parker

Fall is upon us and hopefully will bring cooler weather. Over the past 6 months we have accomplished many things.

Our annual Sister's Luncheon held in March, brought many smiles and thanks from the Nuns who were able to attend. It is such a pleasure to still be able to see, thank, and chat with those who helped with our education. As a Serran, I enjoy the event as much or more as the Sisters. The Priests Picnic this year brought many more attendees, where the priests and seminarians of our diocese were able to relax from their busy schedules. As usual, we provided games but added fishing and swimming to optional activities. The Knights of Columbus volunteered to help, by providing the drinks and bartenders for the event. We are now looking forward and preparing for the Deacons Dinner this October.

We are continuing our vocation trips for the high school students, as well as the grade schools. Mater Dei HS students' trip in March had a slight change in our normal trips by having the girls visit the convent of the Sisters of St Francis of the Martyr St George in Alton, IL. Althoff HS students had their annual trip in April and Gibault HS is being planned for November. Shortly we will be

taking St. John the Baptist and Immaculate Conception grade school children on a vocation trip as well.

With all this we still managed to have some Serrans squeeze in dinner with our seminarians at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, attend the ordination/installation of our new Bishop Godfrey Mullen, attend the Serra International Convention in Indianapolis, IN, and most importantly continue to pray the rosary together both on Zoom calls and at the Monastery of the Poor Clares.

And with that, I again want to remind everyone, our meetings are held on the 1st and 3rd Fridays of the month starting with Mass. We meet at the Poor Clare's Monastery on the 2nd Wednesday of the month for Holy Hour and Rosary. And we dial in to the Zoom call on the 2nd, 4th and 5th Fridays of the month for the Rosary together. Please consider being with us during one of these times as we pray for vocations for priests and religious, not only needed in our Diocese but in the world.



## New 2026–2027 Officers Installed

2026–2027 Officers: (front row, l to r): Mike Kappel, Lou Kappel, Steve Kappel, Marvin Winkeler; (back row, l to r): Steve Bertelsman, Steve Wilson, Jim Wachtel, Bonnie Levin, Janet Hadley, Andi Parker, Margie Pope, Marija Allen, Greg Hipskind.



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## Annual Priests' Picnic *Enjoys Great Turnout*

1: Seminarians Greg Kassen and Kyle Kellerman chatting with the priests. Fr. Thomas Lugge is taking a break from "corn hole". 2: VP-Elect Bonnie Levin and Fr. Mark Stec smiling big for the camera. 3: Bishop Mullen, Cynthia Chaney and seminarian Terry Marmion enjoying a moment before dinner. 4: Fr. Evaristus Akabueze sporting a great summer shirt. 5: Cynthia Chaney and Fr. Levi James enjoying a libation before dinner. 6: Two of our wonderful bartenders from the KC Council 592 who sponsored the bar. 7: Retired Bishop Braxton and Fr. Andy Knopik catching up. 8: Visiting priest, Fr. Nicholas speaking with Vicar General Fr. Nick Junker and Fr. Francis Tambala. 9: Frs. Marvin Volk, Dan Friedman, Levi James, Mark Stec, seminarians Grant Fender, Kyle Kellerman, Greg Kassen, Terry Marmion and new seminarian Christopher Berry enjoying the outdoor space. 10: Seminarian Terry Marmion 11: Fr. Robert Zwilling made the long drive from Mt. Carmel to join with his fellow priests.



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The Serra Club of St. Clair County held its annual Priests' Picnic on July 29, 2026, at the Carrington Place club house. A combination of almost 72 priests, seminarians, and Serrans gathered for the event. Some priests actually took advantage of the fishing opportunity and the corn hole games provided.

Bishop Godfrey Mullen offered the opening prayer and grace over the meal. The open bar was hosted by the Knights of Columbus Council 592 of Fairview Heights. The priests were very grateful for the event and the opportunity to catch up with each other.



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## Sisters' Luncheon

# Another Wonderful Day

The Annual Sisters' Luncheon was hosted at Corpus Christi Parish on Saturday, March 14, 2026. 45 Sisters (past and present holders of assignments in the Diocese) and 16 Serrans gathered for a few hours of reconnecting and enjoying each other's company. The Serrans led off the morning with their musical rendition of "Hello Sisters".

The Sisters were treated to a fried chicken lunch, a number of games of Bingo and each one received an attendance gift. Sister Benet Dvorak, SSND, was "crowned" Queen for the day and chose a special Bingo number which, when called, she was awarded a small gift. Steve Scheninger provided several wonderful vocal arrangements during the luncheon.

1. The Sisters having some refreshment in the Corpus Christi Parish Hall before lunch. 2. The Serrans serenade the Sisters with a rendition of "Hello, Sisters". 3. Serran bartender Steve Kappel pours Sr. Mary a soda 4. Marija Allen (right) welcomes Sr. Tess Markus. 5. The attendance prizes donated by the Serrans 6. Sr. Benet Dvorak, "Queen for the Day" 7. Two sisters enjoying a cocktail prior to lunch. 8. A pause in the conversation of catching up.



## Serra Club Organizes Two Vocations Trips for area High School Juniors

The Serra Club of St. Clair County has continued to provide vocations bus trips for Juniors from Althoff, Mater Dei and Gibault.

On March 24, 2026, The Mater Dei Junior girls traveled to a new location for this trip: the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George in Alton, Ill. Sister Karolyn Nunes, FGSM, Vocation Director for the order, addressed the girls and entertained their questions about the Order and Consecrated Religious Life. The boys visited Kenrick Seminary and were given a tour by Fr. Thomas Lugge, Vocation Director for the Diocese of Belleville.

On April 8, the Althoff Junior boys were transported to Kenrick Seminary, again with Fr. Lugge and the girls went to the Sisters of St. Paul Convent.

After lunch, the Mater Dei students' trip concluded with tours of the Cathedral. The Althoff trip lunch was held in the Notre Dame school cafeteria. The entire class then walked to the Cathedral to pray a rosary for vocations.

The Gibault students will have their trip in the Fall.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### SEPTEMBER

##### 29 • Vocation Trip

10:00 a.m. setup  
at Cathedral St. John,  
Smithton and ICS – Columbia

#### OCTOBER

##### 2 • General Membership Meeting

11:00 a.m., Corpus Christi  
Parish, Shiloh, IL

##### 6 • Deacon's Dinner

3:00 p.m. setup; 5:00 p.m.  
Social, Carrington Place,  
3901 Essex Blvd, Swansea, IL

##### 14 • Holy Hour

4:00 p.m.,  
Poor Clares Monastery  
300 N. 60th St.  
Belleville, IL

##### 16 • Board and General Membership Meeting

Corpus Christi Parish,  
Shiloh, IL

#### NOVEMBER

##### 6 • General Membership Meeting

Corpus Christi Parish,  
Shiloh, IL

##### 12 • Vocations Trip

Setup 10:00 a.m. at  
Cathedral, Gibault High School

##### 20 • Board and General Membership Meeting

9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.,  
Corpus Christi Parish  
Shiloh, IL