SUMMER ODDS & ENDS

July 2025

Read More, View More, Learn More …
Speaker & Topic Follow-Up for the Interested & Curious

Sharing regional and national media sources that either reference or relate to our Serra Club of Philadelphia speakers and/or topics presented from January through July. Enjoy!

Anthony Isacco, "Why Priests Need Hope, and Community, Now More Than Ever," *National Catholic Register*, July 21, 2025.
A commentary on the pressures, challenges, and issues facing our priests today. This article generated 83 reader comments as of July 26.
https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/isacco-priests-need-hope-and-community

Relevant Serra Club Meeting: January 21 (quarterly open access)

Topic:
"Challenges Faced by Clergy and Men and Women Religious: The Unique Struggles Faced by Those with Spiritual Vocations"

Speaker: David Shellenberger, RN, BSN
President & CEO
Saint John Vianney Center
Downingtown, Pa.
https://www.sjvcenter.org

***Recording*:**
https://serraclubphilly.org/resources/#reading
Recorded by Saint John Vianney Center, facilitated by Deacon James S. Friend, Jr., director of mission advancement.

Our speaker introduced us to several serious issues noted six months later in the cited national article. His remarks were insightful in identifying the many positive and joyful ways that we as parishioners can be productive participants in the life of the parish and supportive to our pastors, priests, and religious.

***Recording #2*:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRSXwGKFre4
Recorded by **USA Council, Serra International** for its one-hour **"Serra Speaks"** program, which invited David to speak on "challenges our Church ministers face," **June 16**.

Anna Donofrio, "FIAT Days Creates Days of Haven of Prayer and Camaraderie for 80 Girls," *The Arlington Catholic Herald*, 7/24/25.
A visit with the July 20-24 girls vocation camp that featured 16 religious sisters from eight religious orders at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Md.
https://www.catholicherald.com/article/local/fiat-days-creates-a-haven-of-prayer-and-camaraderie-for-80-girls/

Relevant Serra Club Meeting: February 18

Topic:
"Fiat Days Program: Young Women Exploring Religious Vocations"

Speaker: Sr. Rose Mulligan, IHM, Ph.D.
Coordinator, Fiat Days Program
Diocese of Allentown
Allentown, Pa.
and
Professor of Chemistry and Chair, Department of Natural Sciences
Immaculata University
Immaculata, Pa.

The Fiat Days Program provides high school girls and young adult women with **discernment retreats** of prayer, activities, socialization, sports, and presentations to consider a religious vocation. They are often referred to as female Quo Vadis Days conducted by the seminaries. They vary in length and location, and they often include follow-up events. Our speaker helped to create the Fiat Days program in the **Harrisburg** diocese in 2008, which was then modeled by the **Arlington** (Va.) diocese — apparently to great success, per the cited article — as well as in the **Allentown** (Pa.) diocese, which she has co-directed for more than 10 years. Fiat Day programs also exist in the **Scranton** (Pa.) and **Richmond** (Va.) dioceses, with variations in **Missouri, Texas, California,** and **Colorado**.

Brother Mickey McGrath, OSFS, "All God's Creatures are Full of God," *Catholic Star Herald*, July 18, 2025.
A delightful article by the award-winning author-artist on living with a diocesan priest for the first time, coupled with his depictions of three furry friends.
https://catholicstarherald.org/all-gods-creatures-are-full-of-god/?mc_cid=0cff21e840&mc_eid=415c93605e

Relevant Serra Club Meeting: May 20

Topic:
"Art and Healing"

Speaker: Brother Mickey McGrath, OSFS

Oblate of St. Francis de Sales

Author and illustrator of 21 books

Popular national presenter and retreat director

Lives and works in Camden, New Jersey

Brother Mickey's work centers on the **healing power of art and its unique ability to merge beauty and social justice**, especially as it relates to racial equality. His digital artwork is available as a traveling art exhibit for schools and conferences. His most recent book, *Madonnas of Color,* (ClearFaith Publishing) earned **1st and 2nd Place awards** from various Catholic publishing associations. He spoke with our Serra Club in May to honor **Religious Brothers Month** (Religious Brothers Day was celebrated on May 1, the feast of St. Joseph the Worker, the patron saint of religious brothers) and shared his art and stories about St. Joseph, the religious brotherhood, and his own **50 years as a Brother in the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales**. His **solo exhibits** have been seen throughout the Philadelphia Delaware Valley and across the U.S., from New York to Baltimore to Grand Rapids to Los Angeles. He has taught at a number of educational and other institutions, including De Sales University, Boston College, the Catholic Theological Union (Chicago), and the Grunewald Guild.

https://www.bromickeymcgrath.com –
More on Brother Mickey's education and life … recent media, events, and commissions … his Bee Still Studio.

https://trinitystores.com/collections/br-mickey-mcgrath-osfs
Extensive resources, including a **gallery of Brother Mickey's extensive body of work, close to 400 images** that include the beautiful and touching Stations of the Cross; Our Lady, Jesus, and many martyrs; quotations drawn from St. Francis de Sales, and spiritual observations on contemporary life. Keep clicking the "LOAD MORE" button to see the entire collection, but take time to hover over, open, and enjoy every image.

Pat McCloskey, OFM, "Ask a Franciscan: What is the Secular Franciscan Order?" *Franciscan Media*, September 4, 2024, repeated via link in *Franciscan Media* **July 24, 2025** daily e-newsletter.
Essential facts, history, organizational structure, operation, and locations of the third order of Franciscans founded by St. Francis of Assisi more than 800 years ago specifically for lay men and women.
https://www.franciscanmedia.org/ask-a-franciscan/what-is-the-secular-franciscan-order/

Relevant Serra Club Meeting: **July 19 (quarterly open access)**

Topic:
"The Secular Franciscan Order"

Speaker: Luke LeTourneau, OFS
Secular Franciscan
and
Co-Founder and Chief Fellowship Officer
Live Vertical
Springfield, Pa.

This was Luke LeTourneau's third visit with our Serra Club, this time to speak about his daily life as a Secular Franciscan and in recognition **of July as a special month — July 1 liturgical feast day —** in the life of **our patron, Franciscan St. Junípero Serra** (1713-1784) and on the feast day of another Franciscan great, St. Bonaventure.

The Secular Franciscan Order was the third (first — Order of Friars Minor; second — The Poor Clares) of three families founded by St. Francis of Assisi, somewhere between 1209 and 1215. The order consists of more than 300,000 members, **primarily lay men and women, married and single**, as well as priests and religious, located throughout the world. Luke and his wife, Mary, are the parents of eight children, live in Springfield, Delaware

County, and are members of St. Francis of Assisi Parish there. Luke completed a two-year formation process leading to his public profession with the **Secular Franciscans** in 2021.

Secular Franciscans live and work in all businesses, professions, and other careers and apply the Gospel spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare to those secular lives. Luke was formerly a leadership development specialist with a global company before joining with ministry partner Rob Longo, a health care marketing veteran, to establish Live Vertical, an evangelization and missionary discipleship organization active in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and Diocese of Allentown high schools.

IS SERRA MEMBERSHIP FOR YOU?

Two of the four featured meeting speakers and topics were available to only **Serra Club of Philadelphia** members. We were delighted to welcome everyone to the other two through **quarterly open access.** Our final open-access meeting of the year will occur on October 21, tentative topic and speakers in progress.

We invite men and women who are not now members but who want to support the growth of vocations to the priesthood, permanent diaconate, and consecrated life as women and men religious to consider joining our club as we enter the second half of the year. We would love to welcome you as one of our dedicated members.
Contact: VP of Membership **Maria Pilar Gastelbondo** at mariagastelbondoc@gmail.com
or visit our website at https://serraclubphilly.org/join-now/

Bits & Pieces

Serra Club of Philadelphia Book Recommendations Among Catholic Media Association (CMA) 2025 Awards

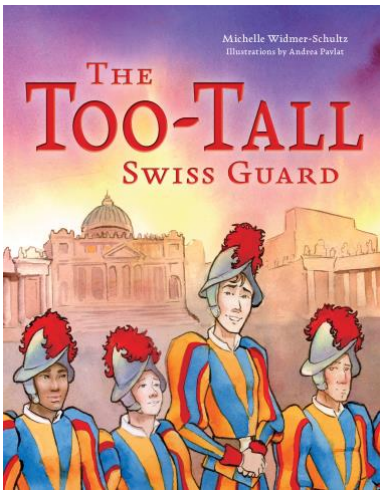
Our readers tell us they appreciate our seasonal lists of books and other gift ideas for adults, young adults, and children for inspiration, enlightenment, and entertainment. We hear that our special focus on children and youth is especially appreciated, particularly by adults who love ditching their children's devices and **putting printed books, quality books, in their hands**!

We're happy to report that **eight of our 98 recommendations**, first shared through our monthly emails from Advent 2024 through two for Summer 2025, then posted on https://serraclubphilly.org/resources/ (then scroll to the end), received 2025 CMA honors. We share here **each of those eight award winners**, along with the book publisher, website, CMA award category, and award.

Fabiola Garza, ***Princesses of Heaven: The Flowers***.
Word on Fire, https://www.wordonfire.com

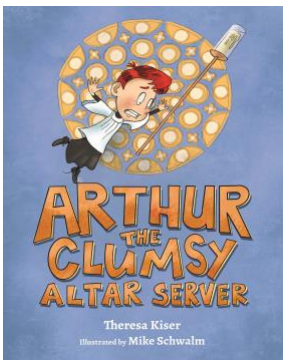
What we said: "This book is destined to be a classic, much-loved already, a treasure for young girls who reportedly read it over and over, cover to cover. A great gift." For girls age 3-8.

First Place: Publishing/Production: Design and Production
First Place: Publishing/Production: Front Cover Artwork
First Place: Publishing/Production: Illustrations
Second Place: Family Life, All Children's Books



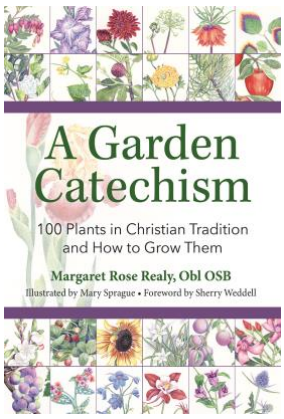
Michelle Widmer-Schultz, ***The Too-Tall Swiss Guard***, with Andrea Pavlat.
OSV, https://www.osvcatholicbookstore.com

First Place: Individual Excellence Awards, First Time Author: Children's Book



Teresa Kaiser, ***Arthur the Clumsy Altar Server Plans the Perfect Lent***, illustrated by Mike Schwalm.
OSV, https://www.osvcatholicbookstore.com

Second Place: Series: Children's Book Series

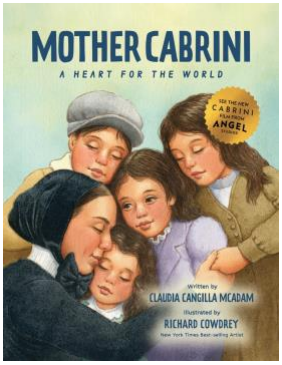


Margaret Rose Realy, Obl. OSB, ***A Garden Catechism: 100 Plants in Christian Tradition and How to Grow Them***.
OSV, https://www.osvcatholicbookstore.com

Second Place: Lifestyle: Lifestyle Books

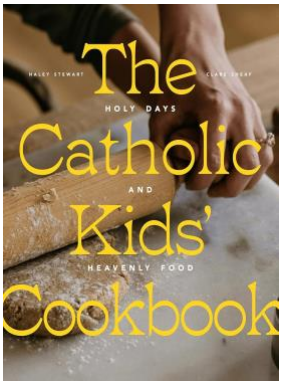
Caryll Houselander, ***The Shepherd's Coat***, illustrated by Jess Mason.
Word on Fire, https://www.wordonfire.org

Honorable Mention: Publishing/Production, Design and Production: Children's Book



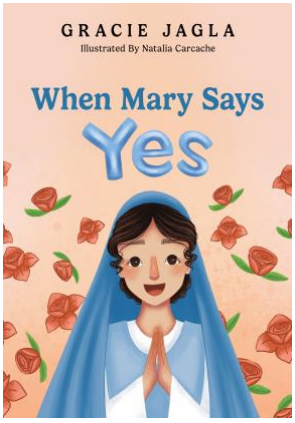
Claudia Cangilla McAdam, ***Mother Cabrini, A Heart for the World***, illustrated by Richard Cowdrey.
Sophia Institute Press, www.sophiainstitute.com

Honorable Mention: Family Life, All Children's Books



Haley Stewart and Clare Sheaf, ***The Catholic Kids' Cookbook: Holy Days and Heavenly Food***.
Word on Fire, https://www.wordonfire.org

Honorable Mention: Individual Excellence Award: Author of the Year



Gracie Jagla, ***When Mary Says Yes***, illustrated by Natalia Carcache.
OSV, https://www.osvcatholicbookstore.com

We recommended this book in its Spanish language translation, ***Cuando María da un Sí*,** with translation by Karla Flores Correa.

Honorable Mention: Family Life: Children's Book Non-Reader
For young children.

While we're at it ---

We introduced our seasonal "recommendations list" in our monthly meeting emails too late to suggest the many wonderful books that qualified for the **CMA awards for 2024**. We share some of those, here, along with the cover photos of a few for your information and possible purchase. We especially feature several children's books that one or two members purchased as holiday and birthday gifts and told us are big hits in their families. We encourage parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, homeschooling parents, principals, pastors, and religious education instructors to consider a purchase or two from this list and from the 2025 awards for **back-to-school planning**.

Don't overlook one or two from this list for yourself, too, and maybe one for your **parish book club** or **parish discussion group**. You'll find a few concerning **religious vocations** as well as **general Church life, faith formation, religious practice, Catholic history, biography, devotion, education, marriage, and more, including adult and teen novels — choices for all ages**.

Selected 2024 CMA Book Award Winners

Andrew and Sarah Swafford, ***Gift and Grit, How Heroic Virtue Can Change Your Life and Relationships***.
Ascension Press, www.ascensionpress.com
First Place: Church Life, Spirituality Contemporary

Antony Barone Kolenc, ***Murder at Pennwood Manor***, The Hardwood Mysteries, Book 5
Loyola Press, https://www.loyolapress.com
First Place: Family Life, Book for Young Adults (*Ages 12-18*)

Patricia Bernstein**, *A Noble Cunning, The Countess and the Tower***.
History Through Fiction Publishers, https://www.historythroughfiction.com
First Place: Novels: Catholic Novel

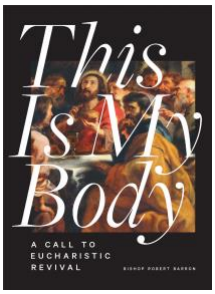
Jen Norton, ***Arise to Blessedness, A Journal Retreat with Eight Modern Saints Who Lived the Beatitudes.***
Ave Maria Press, https://www.avemariapress.com
Second Place: Spirituality Contemporary

David J. Endres, ***Slavery and the Catholic Church in the United States.***
The Catholic University of America Press, https://www.cuapress.org
Third Place: Historical Studies

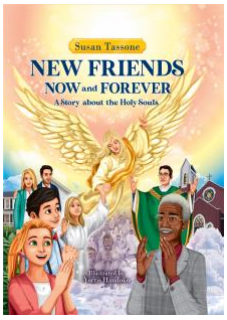
Michael I. Kueber, ***Preaching to Latinos, Welcoming the Hispanic Moment in the U.S. Church***. Foreword by Hosffman Ospino.
The Catholic University of America Press, https://www.cuapress.org
Third Place: Church Life: Church Professional

Susan Flansburg, ***Feels Like Home: A Single Catholic Woman's Guide to Religious Life in the U.S.***
Self-Published, https://www.amazon.com/Feels-Like-Home-Catholic-Religious/dp/B0C2S9T9V5/
https://anunslife.org/podcasts/in-good-faith/igf063-susan-flansburg
Honorable Mention: Self Publisher, Self-Published Non-Fiction Books

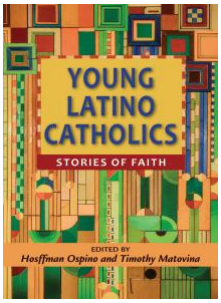
Bishop Robert Barron, ***This is My Body: A Call to Eucharistic Revival***.
Word on Fire, https://www.wordonfire.org
First Place: Church Life, Pastoral Ministry, Catechetical
First Place: Individual Excellence Awards; Author of the Year
Second Place: Education: Sacraments



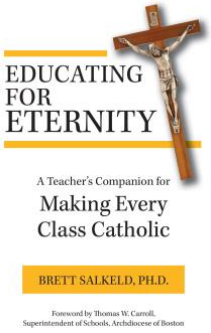
Susan Tassone**, *New Friends Now and Forever, A Story About the Holy Souls*.**
Illustrated by Yorris Handoko.
Most High Publishing, https://bookscouter.com/publisher/most-high-publishing
First Place: Design/Production: Front Cover Artwork
Second Place: Self Publisher: Self-Published Children's Books
Second Place: Education: Faith Formation
Third Place: Design/Production: Design & Production, Children's Book
Third Place: Family Life: Children's Book Reader



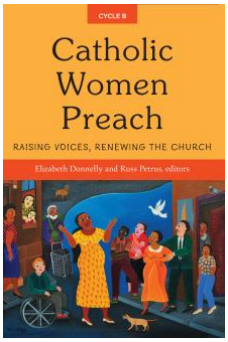
Young Latino Catholics, Stories of Faith, edited by Hosffman Ospino and Timothy Matovina.
Paulist Press, https://www.paulistpress.com
First Place: Church Life, Pastoral Ministry: Youth & Young Adult



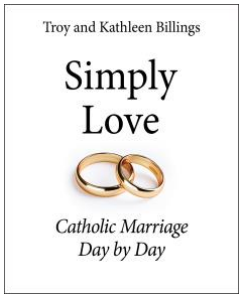
Brett Salkeld, Ph.D., ***Educating for Eternity, A Teacher's Companion for Making Every Class Catholic*.**
OSV, https://www.osvcatholicbookstore.com
Second Place: Church Life: Church Professional



Elizabeth Donnelly and Russ Petrus, editors, ***Catholic Women Preach: Raising Voices, Renewing the Church.*** (Cycle B).
Orbis Books, https://orbisbooks.com/collections/religion
First Place: Church Life, Liturgy

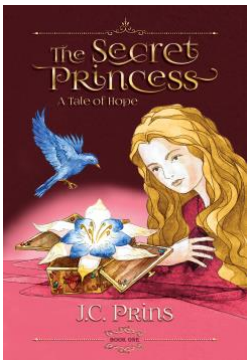


Troy and Kathleen Billings***, Simply Love: Catholic Marriage Day by Day***.
OSV, https://www.osvcatholicbookstore.com
First place: Family Love: The Sacrament of Marriage

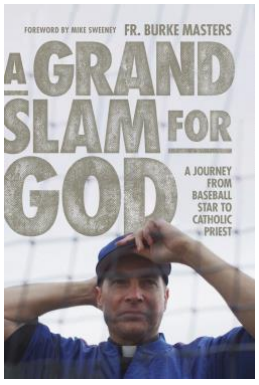


Alexi Sargeant, ***Saintly Creatures, 14 Tales of Animals and Their Companions***.
Illustrated by Anita Barghigiani.
Word on Fire, https://www.wordonfire.com
Second Place: Design/Production, Design & Production: Children's Books
Third Place: Family Life: All Children's Books
Honorable Mention: Family Life: Children's Book Reader

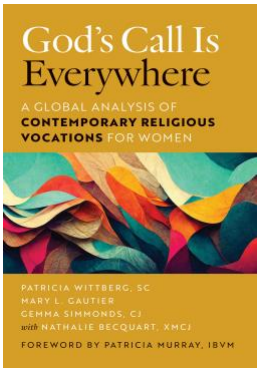
J.C. Prins, ***The Secret Princess, A Tale of Hope***. (*Catholic Fantasy Novel Series*)
Self-Published, J.C. Prins September 2023, https://www.abebooks.com
First Place: Individual Excellence Awards, First Time Author: Novel
Second Place: Individual Excellence Awards, First Time Author: Children's Book
Third Place: Self Publisher, Self-Published Children's Books
Honorable Mention: Family Life: Children's Book Reader
Honorable Mention: Novels: Catholic Novel



Fr. Burke Masters, ***A Grand Slam for God: A Journey from Baseball Star to Catholic Priest***. Foreword by Mike Sweeney.
Word on Fire, https://www.wordonfire.com
First Place: Individual Excellence Awards, First Time Author: Biography
Honorable Mention: Special Collections: Memoir

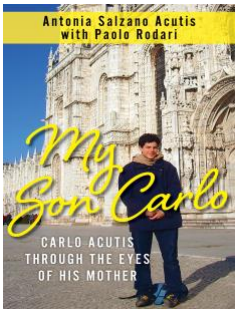


Patricia Wittberg, SC, Mary L. Gautier, Gemma Simmonds, CJ, with Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ, ***God's Call Is Everywhere: A Global Analysis of Contemporary Vocations for Women*.**
Liturgical Press, http://www.litpress.org
First Place: Education: Reference/Academic Studies



Bless the Lord, illustrated by Eileen Ryan Ewen.
Word on Fire, https://www.wordonfire.com
Second Place: Family Life, Children's Book: Non-Reader

Antonia Salzano Acutis**, *My Son Carlo: Carlo Acutis Through the Eyes of His Mother***, with Paolo Rodari.
OSV, https://www.osvcatholicbookstore.com
Second Place: Church Life: Newly Canonized Saints or Those in the Process



Looking for a Recorded Mass?

Check **CatholicTV.org** ("America's Catholic Television Network").

The Boston archdiocese features a wonderful website of media resources, including daily recorded 9:30 a.m. Mass celebrated by its parish priests, as well as by priests from its two seminaries. The monthly Mass/priest schedule is posted on the website. Daily Mass is recorded at the **Chapel of the Holy Cross** at the **CatholicTV network studios in Watertown, Mass.**, is repeated throughout the day ("CatholicTV Mass all day everyday"), and can be accessed for several days following. One of our occasional meeting participants tipped us off to this website. The network also provides links to liturgies celebrated across the country, which include the University of Notre Dame, the National Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, and Spanish-language Mass. CatholicTV.org provides Inspirational, educational, and entertaining programming 24/7.

Couldn't Attend Our February Guided Tour of Philadelphia's Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul?

Check **CatholicTV.org** and its **"Catholic Destinations"** program for an excellent 28-minute video interview recorded a number of years ago with our own **Lou Ferrero**, a Cathedral Ambassador and lifelong parishioner, by program host Kevin Nelson. Recent updates are not included, such as the exquisite reliquary of Carmelite St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus (St. Thérèse of Lisieux) and her parents, St. Zélie Guérin Martin and St. Louis Martin (https://cathedralphila.org/reliquary/), but this is a wonderful introduction to the history and riches of our Philadelphia cathedral. https://www.catholictv.org/catholic-destinations/cathedral-of-saints-peter-and-paul-pennsylvania.html

Serra Club Event Date: **February 21**

Also for viewing: **Rev. Gerald Dennis Gill**, Cathedral rector and pastor, recorded an excellent 2-minute video tour in 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ok5Tc_evBis

Searching for an Easy Car Trip to an Inspirational Site to Close Out Your Summer?

Theresa Civantos Barber, "5 Important Catholic Sites Not to Miss in Pennsylvania," *Aleteia*, July 25, 2025.

Who knows, one of these five could provide content for a fab back-to-school essay!

https://aleteia.org/2025/07/21/5-important-catholic-sites-not-to-miss-in-pennsylvania/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=sendgrid&utm_campaign=EM-EN-Newsletter-Daily-&utm_content=Newsletter&utm_term=20250721

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WE'D LOVE TO KNOW WHAT YOU THINK

We welcome your questions and invite your comments on this mid-summer communication:

- Jorge Ignacio Fernández, President, president@serraclubphilly.org
- Patricia Canning, VP of Communications, communications@serraclubphilly.org or patricia.canning@comcast.net, 215. 870.0794