FALL-WINTER ODDS & ENDS

December 2025

The Board of Directors
of the Serra Club of Philadelphia
wishes all of our members, friends, guest speakers, and occasional visitors
a blessed Christmas and joyful New Year.

VIDEO RECORDINGS NOW AVAILABLE … CAPTURING DYNAMIC SPEAKERS AND COMPELLING TOPICS

Participants in our monthly meetings over the last six months continued to be treated to a variety of speakers offering a dimension of experience in religious and other Catholic life.

Two speakers shared on "special vocations" — missionary life and military life; one spoke about the unique ministerial priesthood connected to Polish Advent and Christmas traditions and customs; and one enlightened on reasons why discerning parents across the country are choosing Catholic classical education for their families. *Video recordings of these four speakers are now available on our website and linked in this newsletter.* The remaining two are in the works — stay tuned! — one providing insight on the increasing number of vocations to the priesthood in the Diocese of Hartford, and the other introducing us to the vocation of a Secular Franciscan from a married man and father of eight, former leadership development executive with a global company, who visited as our July speaker in honor of the July 1 feast day of our patron, Franciscan St. Junípero Serra.

SEPTEMBER 16
Deacon Christopher C. Roberts, Ph.D.
President of the Board, Founding President, and Chaplain
Martin Saints Classical High School
East Norriton, Pa.
Biography: https://serraclubphilly.org/event/monthly-meeting-september/

"The Martin Saints Story as an Example of the National Renewal in Catholic Classical Education"

While many traditional Catholic schools across the country are either closing or consolidating, schools adopting a Catholic classical education are growing. In fact, it's the fastest growing segment of Catholic education in the U.S. today. Deacon Chris Roberts describes the remarkable growth in Catholic classical education, referencing the scope of studies and student life at his own Martin Saints Classical High School. Named for the Martin family of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux (the "Little Flower"), headed by parents St. Louis and St. Zélie Martin, who were canonized 10 years ago in October, Martin Saints is a member of the **Chesterton Schools Network** of approximately 60 Catholic classical high schools throughout the world.

Our speaker notes the search for **strong academic rigor** and **faithful Catholic teaching** that drives parents to choose a Catholic classical education for their families, with the Chesterton Network only one of several options. The **Institute for Catholic Liberal Education (ICLE**) schools offer another choice. Parent research will reveal valuable information on characteristics that most Catholic classical schools share in common. **Serrans** will find this topic especially significant, as recent newspaper articles report on the **impact of Catholic education on increased vocations to the priesthood**.
Video recording: https://serraclubphilly.org/videos/
See Read More, View More, Learn More … pg. 4, Catholic Education, Catholic Classical Education (September) – links to multiple resources on high-aspirational, high-performing Catholic education, Catholic classical education options, and more.

OCTOBER 21
Rev. Michael Della Penna, OFM, STL
- Pastor, St. Leonard of Port Maurice Parish, Boston (North End)
- Spiritual Director & Board Chair, Silent Children's Mission, Toronto
Biography: https://serraclubphilly.org/event/monthly-meeting-october/

"Cultivating Our Lord's Garden Here & Abroad: Priests, Vowed Religious, and Laity in Mission"
*Honoring October as **Annual World Mission Month** and October 19, 2025 as **World Mission Sunday**, and the first of two back-to-back "special vocation" topics and speakers.*

Father Della Penna shared on his 11-year experience as director of Valley of the Angels Orphanage in Guatemala, his missionary work across Africa over many years conducted primarily with Silent Children's Mission and in collaboration with vowed religious from multiple orders and dedicated lay persons. Using a photo gallery of experiences in Guatemala and Africa, Father Michael described the people embraced by his missionary work that now includes the newly formed St. Leonard Parish Guatemala Mission Group, along with Silent Children's Mission's executive director, who is a Toronto nurse, Secular Franciscan, and our speaker's missionary colleague of 20 years.

The October meeting invitations included a **special outreach to the Philadelphia archdiocesan high school chaplains, campus ministers, and guidance counselors** to assist them with first-hand information in discussions with their students.
Video recording: https://serraclubphilly.org/videos/
See Read More, View More, Learn More … pg. 5, Life of a Missionary Priest, Religious, or Lay Person (October) – link to **"A Pastor's Message: African Joy,"** reflections by Father Michael on his November mission trip to Africa; ministering with his parish mission group, on-site vowed religious, and longtime missionary colleague; and the children and families who touched their hearts.

NOVEMBER 18
The Most Reverend Joseph L. Coffey
Auxiliary Bishop, Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA
Washington, D.C.
Biography: https://serraclubphilly.org/event/monthly-meeting-november/

"A Ministry That Serves Those Who Serve"
*Honoring November as **National Veterans and Military Family Appreciation Month** and November 11 **Veterans Day**, and the second of two back-to-back "special vocation" topics and speakers.*

Bishop Coffey spoke about his path to the priesthood and to the military chaplaincy following graduation from La Salle University — where he was an RA, rowed, double-majored in English and French, and spent his junior year at the Sorbonne — and several years as a Catholic school teacher in West Philadelphia, European ski instructor, and auto industry employee.

Bishop Coffey describes his two years of activity in the Philadelphia pro-life movement that included multiple arrests at rescue sites, the realization of his

vocation while on retreat at Malvern Retreat House, his life in the priesthood, and his additional call to the military and 20 years in active military service as a Naval Chaplain that followed, and now with spiritual responsibility for the VA hospitals. He notes the example shown by his late parents, Dr. Francis X. and Roseanita Schubert Coffey, longtime members of Philadelphia's Serra Club, in supporting religious vocations by preceding the family's evening Grace Before Meals with the Serra Prayer for Vocations. Bishop Coffey was so enthusiastic about encouraging religious vocations that he joined our Serra Club of Philadelphia right on the spot during his visit and asked where to pay his membership dues!

The November meeting invitations included a **special outreach to the Philadelphia archdiocesan high school chaplains, campus ministers, and guidance counselors** to assist them with first-hand information in discussions with students.
Video recording: https://serraclubphilly.org/videos/
See Read More, View More, Learn More … pg. 5, Military Chaplaincy (November) – link to a 2021 article profiling the experience of a military chaplain who served in Fallujah; information on five military chaplains awarded the Medal of Honor, including two on the path to sainthood; and link to the magazine for the Archdiocese for the Military Services.

DECEMBER 16
Rev. Timothy Tarnacki, OSPPE, D.Min.
Vocation Director
The Order of St. Paul the First Hermit (the Pauline Fathers & Brothers)
Doylestown, Pa.
and
Director
Office for Ministry with Young Adults
Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Biography: https://serraclubphilly.org/event/monthly-meeting-december/

"Christmas Roots in the Sacraments: What We Can Learn from the Faith of the Polish People and Their Advent & Christmas Traditions"

A treasure trove of information drawn from personal experience! Father Tarnacki shared Advent and Christmas customs and traditions valued by Poles and Polish Americans for centuries. With a series of slides capturing beautiful images, Father Timothy described Polish traditions still connected to the sacraments and sacramental life as expressions of liturgical living. Two major **Advent traditions** stand out — the daily and primarily (but not always) pre-dawn Advent Rorate Caeli Masses beloved by Polish families to honor Our Lady as the light of the world and the December 6 Feast of St. Nicholas.

Christmas traditions followed, with Father Timothy describing the Wigilia, the festive Christmas Eve meal filled with liturgical references and symbolism, beginning only when the first star is visible in the sky, and with prayers and references to the Gospel (Luke 2) and the Magi. He described the distribution of the Oplátek, the thin Christmas wafer distributed during the meal as a reminder of Bethlehem ("house of bread") and deeply spiritual in its intention and symbolism of gratitude, forgiveness, and reconciliation; presentation of the actual Wigilia meal of 12 dishes, all non-meat and representing the Apostles, served on a table dressed with references to the Nativity scene and leading into the "Pasterka" Midnight Shepherds Mass. Father Timothy concluded by emphasizing the importance of 600-plus Christmas Carols, the oldest dating to the 15th Century, deeply religious and known by most Poles, including "In the Silence of the Night," which is connected to the ministerial priesthood.

Father Timothy was born in Poland, immigrated when young to the U.S., graduated from a Stamford, Conn., high school in 2003, returned to Poland for seminary and profession of solemn vows, then back to the U.S. for ordination to the priesthood in 2016 at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Doylestown, Pa. This young priest has developed a strong young adult ministry at the Shrine, while also directing young adult ministry for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. He completed his Doctor of Ministry degree at the Catholic University of America in 2025, specializing in evangelization.
Video recording: https://serraclubphilly.org/videos/
Celebrate Christmas at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa, Doylestown (https://czestochowa.us)
Christmas Eve: Vigil Mass, 5 p.m.; Midnight "Shepherds Mass" in Polish
Christmas Day: 8 a.m., 11 a.m., 2:30 p.m. in English; 9:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m. in Polish. (Sunday schedule)
Nativity tableau with live animals presented throughout the Christmas Season

Read More, View More, Learn More …

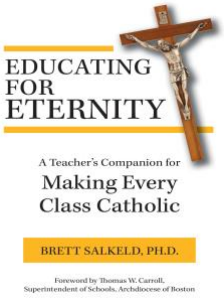
Links to several selected resources that relate to our Serra Club of Philadelphia topics presented in September, October, and November.

Catholic Education, Catholic Classical Education (September)

Resources on Catholic Education, with Special Focus on Catholic Classical Education: A variety of books, articles, textbooks, videos, and other references for parents, Catholic school board members, teachers, administrators, religious education directors, and anyone who wants to revitalize the **academic quality** and **religious content** of the Catholic school curriculum. (PreK-8; Secondary Education)
https://serraclubphilly.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/RESOURCES-ON-CATHOLIC-EDUCATION.pdf

Joseph Pronechen, **"Adopting a Classical Curriculum Energized This Catholic School,"** *National Catholic Register*, January 26, 2025. An enrollment turnaround story as **(K-8) St. Theresa School** in **Trumbull, Conn.**, adopts the curriculum model of the **Institute for Catholic Liberal Education**, following the experience of **K-12 Sacred Heart Academy** in **Grand Rapids** (https://shgr.org), which converted to a classical curriculum in 2013 at the initiative of [former] pastor Rev. Robert Sirico.
https://www.ncregister.com/news/adopting-a-classical-curriculum-energized-this-catholic-school

Joseph Pearce, **"Restoring the Humanities: An Education That's Not for Dummies,"** *The Imaginative Conservative*, April 3, 2025.
https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2025/04/restoring-humanities-education-not-dummies-joseph-pearce.html



Brett Salkeld, Ph.D., ***Educating for Eternity, A Teacher's Companion for Making Every Class Catholic*.**

Second Place Award, Catholic Media Association, 2024
Church Life: Church Professional category.

OSV, https://www.osvcatholicbookstore.com

Luke Larson, **"Bismarck's Secret: Strong Families, Catholic Schools Fuel Vocations Boom,"** *National Catholic Register*, July 27, 2025.
https://www.ncregister.com/news/priestly-vocations-flourish-in-bismarck?utm_campaign=NCR&utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-_4CrYdYvo830jPxYPU4G5Jhl8l1Wzm1v5cAn8AYEknaKmGblthAVgYRqEXE6fH6kTrNwXtPTiJWXpFqA7tvSesvyPrJwaBSYrpfyxISrAdDpxicU8&_hsmi=373174671&utm_content=373174671&utm_source=hs_email

Life of a Missionary Priest, Religious, or Lay Person (October)

Resources on vocations to the priesthood, religious life, and laity in Our Lord's service in foreign missions: https://serraclubphilly.org/resources/#reading, scroll down to click **Missionary Resources** button.

Kristina Millare, **"Pope Leo XIV to Consecrated Men and Women: 'The Church Needs You,'"** *National Catholic Register*, October 10, 2025. "With the conclusion of the two-day Jubilee of Consecrated Life in Rome, the Holy Father said it is necessary for men and women returning to their missions and daily duties abroad to reflect deeper on synodality, which he described as an 'important theme for the Church of our time.'"
https://www.ncregister.com/cna/pope-leo-xiv-to-consecrated-men-and-women-the-church-needs-you

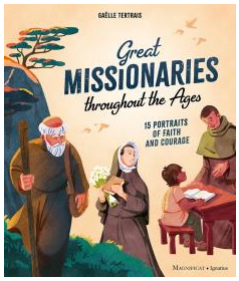
Pontifical Mission Societies, Philadelphia, Pa.: Monsignor James D. Beisel, Director. https://phillymissions.org

Profiles of Patron Saints of Missions and Missionaries, including **Saint Thérèse of Lisieux ("the Little Flower")**, whose feast day was celebrated on October 1. https://phillymissions.org/patron-and-patroness-saints/

"A Pastor's Message: African Joy"

Reflections from **October 2025 guest speaker** Rev. Michael Della Penna, OFM on the nine-day African mission trip conducted by his five-member Boston **St. Leonard Parish Mission Group** and joined by the executive director of Silent Children's Mission in **November 2025**. ***St. Leonard Parish Weekly Bulletin*, December 7, 2025, pgs. 4-5.**
https://files.ecatholic.com/20048/bulletins/20251207.pdf?t=1764960531000

The St. Leonard Parish Mission Group had earlier made a trip to **Guatemala's Valley of the Angels Orphanage** (R), ministering there and "being present" to the families living in the *basurero* area marked by unthinkable poverty. Approximately one month later, Guatemala missioner Anthony Cogliani was distributing supplies contributed by St. Leonard's parishioners to **African children** (C), and guided by a **Sister of Charity of Ottawa**, a religious community with its motherhouse in Ludzi, **Malawi**. Boston missioners Tara Gear and Maria DiStefano, pictured to Anthony's left, joined him in distributing their parishioner-contributed items. *Photos, Silent Children's Mission, https://silentchildrensmission.com*



Gaëlle Tertrais, ***Great Missionaries Throughout the Ages: 15 Portraits of Faith and Courage***. Illustrated by Arnaud Clermont. New York: Magnificat*Ignatius Press, 2022.

For children, a beautiful introduction to the call to a missionary vocation.

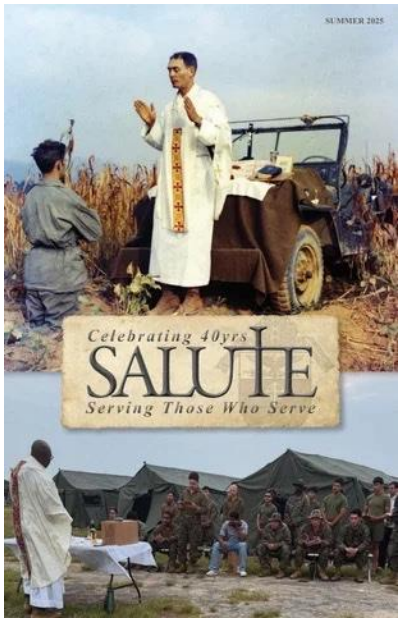
https://ignatius.com/great-missionaries-throughout-the-ages-6gmah/

Military Chaplaincy (November)

Katie Rutter, **"St. Francis: Giving Comfort to Weary Soldiers,"** *St. Anthony Messenger*, Franciscan Media, November 2021. A former military chaplain explains how St. Francis can be an example for those struggling with the traumas of war**.** Father Conrad Targonski served for 22 years, two tours in Iraq, deployed with the Seventh Marine regiment during the 2004 Battle of Fallujah.
https://www.franciscanmedia.org/st-anthony-messenger/november-2021/st-francis-giving-comfort-to-weary-soldiers/

"Honoring Our Military Chaplains," USCCB.
"Five military chaplains, all of them Catholics, have received the Medal of Honor since the Civil War. Two of them are on the path to sainthood as their stories of bravery have touched people the world over. Their example inspires a new generation of men to be chaplains as well."
https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/priesthood/priestly-life-and-ministry/honoring-our-military-chaplains

Salute¸ the magazine for the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA.
https://issuu.com/militaryarchdiocese/stacks/fbbe436334154743b636c8ed2f13523e



Missed Our November 6 Annual Mass and Luncheon for Newly Ordained Priests?

View the **Mass video:** https://vimeo.com/event/3860077

The Most Reverend Keith J. Chylinski
Auxiliary Bishop of Philadelphia
Principal Celebrant

Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul and Shrine of St. Katharine Drexel.

Also, view the **Photo Gallery** of the **Annual Mass and** the **Luncheon** that followed at the Sheraton Philadelphia Downtown, welcoming close to 100 guests who enjoyed the traditional Q&A session of the newly ordained priests … and especially robust this year!

Club president **Jorge Ignacio Fernández** moderated the luncheon program.

Students and chaplains or campus ministers from **eight area Catholic high schools** attended, including: Martin Saints Classical High School; St. Hubert Catholic High School for Girls; Monsignor Bonner and Archbishop Prendergast Catholic High School; Archbishop John Carroll High School; Archbishop Wood High School; Cristo Rey Philadelphia High School; Ss. John Neumann and Maria Goretti Catholic High School, and West Catholic Preparatory High School. Students from Pope John Paul II High School registered, but morning-of illness prevented their participation. Luncheon guests peppered the newly ordained priests with a variety of questions on their education, vocation path, seminary experience, and first months in the priesthood.

The five priests ordained on **May 17, 2025** for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and their assigned parishes are:

- **Rev. Robert T. Bollinger**
  Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
  Northeast Philadelphia

- **Rev. Peter Nguyen**
  St. Andrew
  Newtown (Bucks County)

- **Rev. Przemyslaw Rozestwinski**
  St. Patrick
  Norristown (Montgomery County)

- **Rev. Edward Town IV**
  St. Monica
  South Philadelphia

- **Rev. Richard Withers**
  Diocesan Hermit

Profiles of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's five priests ordained in May 2025 are linked from https://catholicphilly.com/2025/05/photo-features/photos-five-men-ordained-as-priests-for-the-archdiocese-of-philadelphia/

While You're in the Photo Gallery …

The Serra Club of Philadelphia hosts Saint Charles Borromeo seminarians, staff, and other guest priests at an **Annual Night at Phillies**.

The 2025 event took place on September 23 at Citizens Bank Park.

The Phils played the Miami Marlins, losing 6-5 in 11 innings … but, as always, a fun time was had by all.

https://serraclubphilly.org/news/#gallery

TWO UPCOMING VOCATION PROGAMS FOR ALL AGES

National Vocations Summit: March 13-15, 2026

Cheshire, Connecticut

On the campus of Legion of Christ Seminary

A program for all ages, and **heavily directed at our Catholic youth**, from **FOCUS** (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) Campus Ministries founder Curtis Martin. The 2026 program, with the theme "Awakening Apostles of Hope," will include presentations by **University of Mary** (North Dakota) **President Monsignor James Shea**.

"The National Vocation Summit seeks to **build a true vocation culture** in any Christ centered community in the Church, building leadership teams of committed Vocation Apostles. … Join leaders from all walks of life: **married, single, religious, and clergy** for a transformative event focused on discernment, strategic planning, and becoming a **Vocation Apostle** for Christ. Hear expert speakers, listen to personal testimonies, and participate in workshops on team building and vocation development."

For information and registration: https://nationalvocationsummit.org.
Early Bird by January 15: $200
From January 16: $250.
Registration for Religious, Priests, Consecrated Persons: $175.

"Called, Chosen, and Gifted": April 10-11, 2026

Philadelphia, Pa.

Mother Boniface Spirituality Center

A two-day retreat from the **National Religious Vocation Directors, Delaware Valley Member Area** for **single Catholic women and men ages 20-45** who want to explore religious life.

This **intercongregational program** will take place at the **Mother Boniface Spirituality Center** in Northeast Philadelphia.

Contact: cmeighan@ssjphila.org for information.
Registration and $50 fee required **by March 27**.

The event organizers welcome donations to support the attendance of retreatants.

Looking Forward . . . For Your Calendar

SPEAKERS AND TOPICS COMING UP IN THE NEW YEAR

January 20: QUARTERLY OPEN-ACCESS MEETING
Rev. Thomas Dailey, OSFS
John Cardinal Foley Chair of Homiletics and Social Communications
and
Project Director
The Catholic Preaching Institute
Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary
Archdiocese of Philadelphia
"Let's Build a Fire in Every Pulpit! (and Other Thoughts on Catholic Preaching)"

February 17
Deacon Jim Coffey, M.A.
Senior Vice President of Development
The Papal Foundation
Chester, Pa.
"The Papal Foundation: Created in Philly, Supported Across America, Distributing Millions Worldwide"

March 17
Rev. Sean English
Director
Vocation Office for the Diocesan Priesthood
Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Topic to be announced

Bits & Pieces . . .

Thinking About Your Charitable Contributions?

We've been asked how our members and friends can include the **Serra Club of Philadelphia** among their **2025 year-end charitable contributions**. ***Easy!*** Click https://serraclubphilly.org/donate/ (**DONATE** button at the top of our homepage). Convenient PayPal and Venmo payment options. Gifts by check are welcome, as well, by printing out the form from the DONATE page and mailing.

Gifts made electronically must be completed by 11:59 p.m., December 31; **checks** must be written and **envelopes postmarked** by December 31.

We thank you for supporting vocations to the priesthood and religious life through the work of the Serra Club of Philadelphia.

Is Serra Membership for You?

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. We would love to welcome you at our next meeting.

Annual dues: $100-individual, age 35 and up * $150-spouses * $50-individual, under age 35
All members receive a subscription to *The Serran Magazine*.

Contact: VP of Membership Maria Pilar Gastelbondo at mariagastelbondoc@gmail.com or visit our website at https://serraclubphilly.org/join-now/.

Suggestions for Speakers or Topics?

We're all ears. Let us know if you have someone you'd like suggest as a guest speaker or a topic you'd like us to pursue for our monthly meetings conducted by Zoom.

We welcome your questions and invite your comments:
president@serraclubphilly.org or jifernandez1@aol.com
communications@serraclubphilly.org or patricia.canning@comcast.net

Custom nativity by Navidad Nativities, Doylestown, Pa.
Visit www.navidadnativities.com to enjoy additional custom nativities.

Visit World Nativities 2025, the Philadelphia region's most extensive collection of multi-dimensional nativities from around the world, exhibited by **Glencairn Museum**, Bryn Athyn, Pa., through January 25. https://www.glencairnmuseum.org