

"HOLY MOMENTS" AT CONCEPTION ABBEY



By Dick Shaw, Club #25

"They call me, 'The Nun with a Gun'." This surprising quote startled the 130 attendees at the 1st Annual Convention of the newly formed Central Region of Serra USA Council held November 1-3, 2019 at Conception Abbey in Conception Missouri. The theme for the weekend which began on All-Saints Day was appropriately entitled, "Called to be

Saints." The attention-getting quote came from a living-saint, **Sister Nancyrose Gucwa, O.S.B.**, who is a member of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde, MO. Here is her vocation story.



When Nancyrose Gucwa was just about to graduate from high school, her father asked her where she was going to college. After much discussion, he suggested that she apply to one of the service academies because they were going to admit women for the first time. She applied at West Point Military Academy and was accepted along with around 130 plus young women. As you could imagine, the women were not really welcomed by

the formerly all-male fellow students. Sister stayed with the training all the way and actually helped some of the men finish the course because, "they weren't going to have some girl 'show them up' during physical endurance exercises." Among other things while she was in the Army, she leaped out of 40 perfectly good airplanes and never got hurt.

Fast forward. Nancyrose remained in the Army Reserves after her service in Germany and got a job on Wall Street in the financial district. After her employer was bought out, she moved to St. Louis and worked in the Mutual Funds Industry. She was an "East Coast Girl" but adjusted to life in the Midwest. Although her life had been filled with successes, she did not feel complete and asked herself, "Is this all there is?" A counselor asked her if she ever thought about the "religious life." She said, "No." He said there are a number of religious orders with different charisms and suggested that she should investigate some of them. He told her about a Benedictine Order in Clyde, MO that might fit her personality. "Where is Clyde, MO?" After checking out the Convent on-line and realizing that she was "too old to get accepted"—she called anyway. The Sister who answered the phone (a living saint), asked the dreaded question, "What is

your age?” There was a pause. . . and then the “living saint” said, “Come anyway.” Long-story short, she was accepted. However, she still had two years of service in the Army Reserves to qualify for her pension. The Order worked out a deal with the Army so Sister could continue to go for monthly and summer training. When she showed up for training, her fellow platoon members nick-named her. . . you guessed it . . . “The Nun with a Gun.”

A total of 119 Serrans and spouses attended the Convention and of these seventeen were attending their first Convention. The five bishops in attendance participated in the all Masses, meals, etc. There were also six priests, religious and Serra Officers who served as our Presenters and took part in all of the events – a grand total of 130 at the Convention.

Our meeting began on Friday, November 1 with Mass celebrated by **Bishop James V. Johnston**



who has served as Bishop of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph for the past four years. He said that he was, “profoundly grateful to Serra International for their indefatigable efforts in support of vocations to the priesthood and religious life.” He added

that in our local Church, “the Serra Clubs have been in the forefront of efforts to promote and support priestly and religious vocation. Our whole diocese is indebted to the labors of the generous and dedicated laymen and laywomen who aid us by their many works and fervent prayers.” The Traveler’s Mass was offered in the beautifully restored Basilica of the Immaculate Conception. Bishop Johnston concelebrated the Mass with guest bishops and priests on the Solemnity of All Saints. Immediately before Mass, Bishop Johnston and Serrans from the Central Region joined the Monks of Conception in praying Vespers.

Msgr. Michael Mullen, who is the Chaplain of Serra Club of the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, served as emcee for the conference. Msgr. Mullen is a native of Kansas City, Kansas and was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese in 1962. He has been a Serran since 1975 and reminded us that

the Serra International is considered to be “the vocation arm of the Catholic Church.” As a former faculty member of the Savior of the World Seminary High School in Kansas City, Kansas, he told the attendees “to take notes during the presentations because there would be a quiz on Saturday at the close of business.” Msgr. Mullen was a fabulous emcee who could quickly summarize what the previous speaker said and lead us smoothly into the upcoming presentation.



After our opening dinner, Msgr. Mullen introduced our host for the weekend, **Abbot Benedict Neenan, O.S.B.** Abbot Benedict is a native of Kansas City, MO who joined the Benedictines at Conception Abbey in 1979. He studied Theology at Catholic University in Washington D.C. and later earned a doctorate in Church History in 1996 from the same institution. In addition to teaching Theology and Church History at Conception Seminary, he served a Prior of the Monastery, President-Rector, and Business Manager before being elected Abbot of Conception on November 22, 2016. Abbot Benedict welcomed the Serrans to the Abbey by saying, “*Mi Casa es to Casa.*”



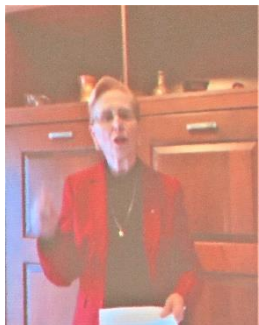
Abbot Benedict began his presentation with a prayer from St. John Henry Newman that “gave credit to God, not himself.” Our brand-new saint said that he didn’t have “virtues by himself but is simply an instrument of God’s work.” Father Abbot said that originally holiness was thought to be closeness to God and not a virtue, but “holiness comes from association with God.” He added that in the New Testament we learn that it is Christ who makes us holy. He reminded us that “many people are the last to recognize their own sanctity but people surrounding them do take note.” Basically, we serve as “great examples” to others even without realizing it. Abbot Benedict said that prayer is not a way to

earn points with God but through prayer we become aware of God's actions in our lives—to become connect to God.

Richard Arians who is President-Elect of Serra USA Council spoke of the importance of being a great leader in Serra. He said that you must “believe in the mission of Serra” and be willing to accept positions of leadership. He said that when someone is asked to take on a leadership role, the person may say, “I want some time to pray over it before accepting.” Richard said that that is all fine and good, but he suggested, “If **you** are asked to take a position, don't pray on it first. Say ‘yes first’ and then “pray on it” because that is when you will really need it! Arians said that Serra International is working on programs to do workshops in diocese to promote Vocation Committees in parishes—these have already started in Pittsburgh. He said that there needs to be a minimum of five parishes and hopefully closer to ten to initiate the program. This is an effort to help the diocese and individual parishes to get a vocation program started. He told us about the “Missionaries of St. Junipero Serra Contest” recruitment program that gives a reduction in dues for any club that has a net gain of 5 or more new members. Any club achieving this will receive a 10% rebate of club dues for one year starting July 2020. However, clubs must register by November 30th in order to participate in the contest.



Judy Cozzens is the current President of the Serra USA Council and is a very enthusiastic speaker.



Unfortunately for us, at the same time as our Convention, Judy was invited to speak to a Convention on the East Coast. Since this group had not had a Convention for an extended period of time, she flew East and could not make a physical appearance at our

convention—but she addressed us anyway through the magic of video.

Judy said that “actions speak louder than words” and that the mission of Serra has been laid on our hearts. She said that with all the problems in the Church, it is time to work even harder as soldiers for the Lord. Judy reassured us that the dues that we pay to Serra International are an investment in the future of the Church. As one of the prime developers of the SPARK Program (Serra Promotion And Resource Kit—digital resource aimed at Vocation Directors), she recommended that



individual Serra Clubs should examine the resources that are available to it and adopt those programs that are deemed beneficial. She referred to us to **SerraSPARK.org** for additional ideas.

Judy said that we need to pray for our Vocation Director every day. We could offer private prayer, daily Mass, adoration or a rosary for the Vocation Director in our Diocese. She reminded us that, “Vocation Directors do not seek out that job but accept it in obedience to their bishop.” Our prayers will help to remove obstacles facing these men as the devil works against them and tries to make them fail.

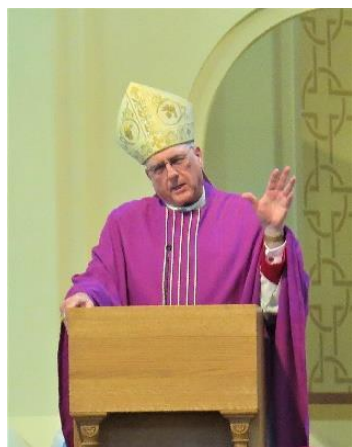
Although Judy Cozzens was “not live”, she asked **Richard Arians**, who spoke to us last night at dinner, to appear “live” and bring her message to the convention. Richard pulled up the SPARK website on his cell phone and showed it on the large overhead screen so all could see. He showed us that there are 27 Tools on the



website and many of these have been specifically requested by Vocation Directors. There are videos with most of the 27 Tools which are professionally done and updated as need. (Richard showed the attendees two or three videos just to prove his point.) Some of the Tools in the Kit are: Adopt a Seminarian; Called by Name; Traveling Crucifix; Organizing Visits to Seminaries; Discernment Retreats; 31 Clubs; Newman Connection; Holy Hours; etc. (Check out the website mentioned above)

Archbishop Joseph Naumann, the Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, offered Mass for us in the Basilica. He welcomed the 2019 Convention to Conception Abbey and expressed his gratitude for the Serrans “continued prayers for vocation to the priesthood.” He said, “Your prayers are the foundation for all our efforts to foster vocation to the priesthood and religious life and for holy, happy priests. I am grateful for your encouragement and loving care of our priests.” He said that seminarians appreciate the support of the Serra Clubs and they know that we pray for them and love them. Archbishop Naumann also spoke of the importance of celibacy in the priesthood and how it makes sense for the Catholic Church—especially now that there is so much cultural confusion about sex and marriage in the secular world.

John Liston, Executive Director of Serra International, gave the Convention a summary of the state of Serra. He emphasized that Serra International is focused on supporting individual clubs. He gave us many examples of Serra’s successes around the globe—especially in Australia, Thailand and



Brazil. John also talked about Serra International Foundation—what it is and what it supports worldwide. He encouraged all of us to support the efforts of the Foundation.

Col. John Halloran, Vice-President of Membership for the USA Council, took center stage and asked for volunteers. We didn’t know why he wanted volunteers, but folks came forward. John asked us, “Do you read *The Serran Magazine*?” He said if we did, we would know about the five articles he as published in the magazine on membership. He had the titles of the articles listed on his PowerPoint and briefly explained their messages to Serrans.



He brought “2 Skits” with him and had volunteers come up to read the parts. In the first skit we learned about his color coding of clubs—Blue is for “super clubs” having over 100 members; Green are clubs that are doing “OK”; Yellow is for clubs with 20 to 25 members; Red is clubs going negative in membership; and Black is for closed clubs. Halloran asked that we have members attend his telephone conference calls to get some new ideas on how to increase club membership. His second skit made us aware of how a club can become basically a “social club” that does not invite new members to join. He said, “We make little effort to help new members feel welcome. In fact, we might even make them feel unwelcome by our words and actions.” He said that new people must be invited to join you at your table to make them feel welcome.



John told us that we need to “recruit the next generation of Serrans to replace ourselves.” We need to develop both short and long-range recruitment goals. To make his point, he asked for

a show of hands and asked, “How many of you are membership recruiters?” When just a few hands went up, he said, “You are wrong! All hands should be up—you must all be recruiters.” Col. Halloran is right.

To the rescue—**Msgr. Mike Mullen**. He filled in for Father Patrick Rush who was unable to attend



because of illness. So Msgr. Mullen’s pulled out his bag of tricks and quickly gave us a presentation on the Mysteries of the Rosary. He even had a “handout!” What a remarkable man! He led us through each the 20 Mysteries one

by one and explained the significance and how to meditate on it. Since Pope St. John Paul added the Luminous Mysteries, we now have four major sets of Mysteries—Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious and Luminous. Each of these major mysteries have five mysteries that correspond to the five decades of the Rosary. The Rosary has been an approved popular devotion since the Middle Ages. The daily reflection on and living Christ’s life, helps to enrich the prayers at Mass. Both Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Francis say all FOUR sets of mysteries each day.

Our keynote speaker was **Father Paul A. Turner, STD** pastor of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Kansas City, MO and who holds a doctorate in Sacred Theology from Saint Anselmo in Rome. He has numerous publications including *Guide for Celebrating Confirmation* and



Pastoral Companion to the Roman Missal. He is a regular contributor to *Worship Magazine*’s “The Amen Corner.” In addition, Father Turner serves as a facilitator for the International Commission on English in the Liturgy and as the Ecumenical Officer

for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph.

His After-Dinner Presentation was about praying to the saints in Mass. He mentioned during Eucharistic Prayer at Mass, references are made to Mary, Joseph and individual saints—particularly in Eucharistic Prayer #1. He told us why some are mentioned, and others are not and, of course, he used his tremendous sense of humor during his explanations. Father called our attention to the “Collect” prayers at the beginning of Mass which “most of us tend to ignore” but he said that these prayers actually set the tone for the Mass and they are written to specifically remember the saint whose feast we are celebrating. He chose a few saints who are remembered in November to illustrate his points: St. Charles Borromeo, St. Rose Philippine Duchesne and St. Cecilia.

Jim Burns from the Serra Club of Kansas City, KS served as Chair for the convention. After dinner, he thanked by name, the planning committee and each person who chaired a subcommittee or contributed in a special way to make the convention a success. In addition, he thanked the Conception staff, seminarians and especially Karen and Maite who “tended to the details.” The planning committee made sure that attendee had plenty of personal time to make visits to the Blessed Sacrament, go to confession, walk the grounds, pray and reflect—and take a nap.



In addition, time was set aside to mingle with other Serrans in the newly created Central Region. A hospitality room was made available for Serrans and before the Banquet Dinner, a cocktail reception was provided by the Abbey. An optional tour of the Benedictine Convent of Perpetual Adoration at Clyde, MO which is just a few miles away from Conception was made available.



And how could I forget, each member who attended the conference received a “goodie bag” full of surprises! The bag had a quote on it from St. Catherine of Siena that read, “Be Who God Meant You To Be and You Will Set the World on Fire.” The bag contained prayers, a rosary, candy, protein bars, pens, hand-wipes, tension ball, a sample bag of Kansas City Blend coffee from the Roasterie, band-aids, post-it notes, Conception’s Christmas Card

Catalogue with a free Christmas Card, catalogue from Vianney Vocations, sun glasses from Rockhurst University, a “Christ is the Key” key chain, lip balm, Father Robert Barron’s book, *Letter to a Suffering Church*, a copy of the November edition of *Give Us this Day* and Matthew Kelly’s book, *The Biggest Lie in the History of Christianity* – which is all about having “holy moments” and how these “holy moments” may help you become a saint.



