



The USA Council of Serra International

by Serra's USA Council President Greg Schwietz

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Serra is facing the effects of a long-term leadership crisis.



Some would say we have a membership problem. Many clubs report that their membership is aging and that it is hard to recruit new members. Some are suffering from years of facing this seemingly impossible obstacle, citing many attempts to increase membership to no avail; declining membership rosters; and, another symptom, reports of club officers finding no one who is willing or able to replace them in their current position. Some cite national statistics that report membership in service organizations throughout the United States is down, advising us to just accept that fact as the fate of Serra.

Some would say we have a money problem. They complain about the difficulty of some Serrans, those who are on fixed income, to afford basic dues, or those who feel that a larger portion of their combined Serra dues should be used in their local area, supporting their seminarians and priests; that there is not enough money around to really do a good job with vocations.

Others complain about the Serra "troubles" of the recent past; citing examples of frustrated Serrans and entire clubs who view the inevitable politics found within human organizations as a particularly unique issue with Serra, ignoring the necessary change that these events can bring to a once proud yet complacent organization.

I say we have a leadership problem, and it is pervasive, and it is solvable. Let me offer you a few suggestions on how to face this issue and take it head on.

First, the good news

Serra has one of the greatest missions in all the Church; namely, we have been granted the important role as the lay vocations arm of the Church, world-wide, and soon to be expanded to the moon and Mars, as soon as they establish dioceses up there. This is a mandate that was given to Serra by Pope Pius XII and confirmed by every successive pope since. And this is a focused mission, very specific.

Secondly, Serra has an 85-year legacy of effective commitment to this mission. So, it is our history that supports our future actions. We are organized, connected, and experienced. We are the boots on the ground for religious vocations to the priesthood and consecrated religious life.

What needs to be done

First, be proud of your work as a Serran. It's important. Very important. Don't ever doubt it. No less than our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has recently stated this in his address to Serrans this past summer, "(Serrans), the Church and priestly vocations need you!" (Pope Francis' address to Serrans, June 23, 2017, Rome Italy). But it is too important to be the sole workers on this great mission of "fostering and affirming vocations to the priesthood and consecrated religious life"; Serrans are called to lead it.

Which brings us to our second challenge, new member recruitment. It may sound odd to say it, but Serra membership is not for everyone. Its mission is for everyone, all baptized Catholics. But sustainable membership in Serra requires INTENTIONAL recruitment. Not exclusive, but intentional. Recruiting strong Catholic men and women who are active in the community or their local church will improve the odds that your club will reflect the same qualities. Just like any good team, we need to recruit the best in order to become the best.

After finding our new vocations leaders, we need to immediately ENGAGE them in active and meaningful work. Review the "work" that your club performs and supports. Is it big? Is it relevant to the vocational needs of your diocese? If you don't know, then ask the two people in your diocese who can tell you, your bishop and your diocesan vocations director. If their answer is no, then it is time to reorder the house.

Big, meaningful vocations activities attract good leaders. But, even given how important that is, it is spiritual growth, within the context of club meetings, that will keep them. A strong, vibrant program tradition in your club is what is needed. More inspirational, and less informational, club meetings is a necessary place to start. Use the USA Council Club Programs — Called to Holiness manual to help guide your club's spiritual growth.

Leadership development starts then. Each club needs to initiate a Leadership Development Committee in order to properly develop all club members and to maximize their talents in the service to our mission. Leadership development is necessary to position and evaluate individuals in important tasks within the club's hierarchy of activities and responsibilities.

The leadership crisis Serra faces will only be resolved by intentional recruitment, active engagement and wise leadership development at the club level. From there, if this is done right, will come the next big crop of Serra leaders and, more importantly, Catholic leaders for the Church of today and tomorrow.