

The convention in Nashville attracted 400+ attendees from around the world including Australia, Thailand, Nigeria, Mexico and Canada. Religious leaders attending included Cardinal Collins from Toronto, Bishops Sample of Portland, Cozzens of Minneapolis, Sartain of Seattle and Spalding of Nashville.

The convention opened Thursday afternoon, on the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, with Mass at the Cathedral of the Incarnation. Mass was followed that evening with dinner at Fleming Hall and later a trip for many to the Ryman Auditorium for a musical taste of Nashville. Friday was a good day full of meetings and presentations including Cardinal Collins, Dan Jones the President of Serra International and a noted panel of Sr Peter Marie a Dominican Sister of St Cecilia (and a graduate of our KU), Fr Gilstrap and Deacon Bougrat. Take aways included that discernment begins by learning how to pray (as early as the 5th grade), that we should send prayer cards and notes to our seminarians, that dads should mentor sons from the 5th grade through high school and that we should remember that Cardinal Dolan reminds us that 1/3 of vocations come from home schoolers.

During his presentation, Dan Jones reminded us that when it comes to vocations God does the calling. We as Serrans need to provide the environment where that calling can be nurtured and grow for all of our seminarians. Mass Friday evening was at the new Catholic Pastoral Center and was celebrated by His Eminence Thomas Cardinal Collins Archbishop of Toronto. Saturday was a day full of great speakers who both challenged and motivated us by their presentations. First, Michael Warsaw who is the executive chief officer of EWTN who quoted their late founder Mother Angelica reminding us that "we are all called to foster vocations to the religious life". Tom Thibodeau who is a member of the faculty at Viterbo University, left us with some of the following, Our job is to make the invisible God visible, that service is Love made visible, that self-serving leaders use a lot of I while others use Us and that our Words and Presence inspires others.

On Saturday morning we gathered to participate in the Global Rosary for Vocations which occurs at 8:00 a.m. on the last Saturday of each month. The call in number can be found on our website. Following lunch on Saturday we had a truly inspirational speaker, Judy Cozzens, the new President of Serra USA who walked us through a great vocation program called SPARK. SPARK spells out 5 tools to create a culture of vocations in your community. Adopt a Seminarian, the 31 club, traveling Crucifix, Priesthood Sunday and Holy Hours. Please go to serraspark.org for all of the details to support these programs.

That evening we closed our 76th International Convention with Mass celebrated by Cardinal Collins and Archbishop Sample. A formal dinner followed honoring both our religious and those responsible for the time and energy involved in organizing the convention. To wrap up it was a great experience for both Jim and me. I would encourage all of you to consider attending one of the Serra meetings outside of our luncheons to grow and foster your support for vocations in our Diocese. God Bless, Gary