

## Chapter 4, the 1990 's

Now we will see how the founding of our Club by it's earliest members has enabled us to continue to bring about a culture of vocations. Much has to be done. One area of our support of seminarians has not been mentioned. This support was, and is, in the form of financial assistance. From the very beginning, our Club attempted to provide some assistance to the seminarians, primarily for their personal needs. The Archdiocese maintained their schooling cost. Our contribution was to augment what the Archdiocese provided. We called it the Seminarian Book Fund. All members were encouraged to contribute to it in addition to quarterly dues. These funds were kept apart from our operating monies and are distributed to them twice a year. We continue to receive "thank you" expressions from them. Many priests of today will attest to the importance to them of our gift when they were in seminary.

The Serran footprint in the Archdiocese began to grow. Up until now, our Club was the only one active. This was about to change. On March 2, 1991 the Serra Club of Topeka was chartered. We were the sponsoring Club. Unfortunately, due to the Topeka Club records not being available, we have been unable to learn the history of their charter. We do know that Father Norbert Lickteig of Christ the King parish was their first Chaplain. We will address the starting of the Lawrence Club, as well as, the Johnson County Club later, and supplement the history of Topeka.

A major change in the life of our Archdiocese occurred when Archbishop Strecker retired in June of 1993 after serving 24 years. Archbishop grew up in Spearville, KS, a farming community. He was dedicated to farm families, appearing numerous times before State and National committees on their behalf. He also was extremely committed to Right to Life, especially abortion. He called out Kathleen Sibelius, then a representative in the legislature, for her stance on abortion comparing it to the Holocaust. Finally, he was a visionary. He prepared the diocese for growth, especially in Johnson County, by purchasing sites for parish church locations long before they were built.

On June 23, 1993, Bishop James P. Keleher became our Archbishop. An Irishman from Chicago, Arch Jim, as he liked to be called, had been Bishop of Belleville, Ill. and before that had served as Rector of Mundelein Seminary. Archbishop Keleher quickly visited as many places and met as many people in the Archdiocese as possible in time allowed. Everyone loved his friendliness, sense of humor, and three- point homilies. At the time of his installation there were four men in seminary for our Archdiocese. Arch Jim made it very clear that vocations would have priority in his plans.

Dr. Jim Pretz became District Governor Elect in 1995. He was then District Governor in 96-97. While District Governor our club had written to Serra International complaining about the cost

of dues as, well as, how the monies were being spent. Our USA Clubs were carrying most of the load supporting Serra International. At the next board meeting, at Holy Name church (as we were moving board meetings to different parishes) Dr. Pretz appeared uninvited. He quickly presented us with our choices: pay our dues and remain a Serra Club; don't pay and we would no longer be a Serra Club, 'nuff said. Since then the dues structure has improved.

In 1996 Arch Jim made a significant vocation move as he appointed the first full- time Director of Vocations. Before they had been part- time. As we look back to that time we can see the benefit of the full-timer in terms of numbers of seminarians increasing, as well as, the quality of the candidates continuing to be excellent.

At this time additional activities became part of supporting vocations. First, the 5<sup>th</sup> grade vocation day began. For the first few years it was held at St. Joseph in Shawnee. It was then moved to Prince of Peace in Olathe and is now at Ascension parish. John Wissman was very involved in planning and manning jobs for the day. A meal is served to around 1000 kids in short order. Ben Zarda, a very generous Serran, has donated everything for the meal all these years. John Muehlberger has assisted Ben in many ways and he has succeeded John Wissman.

A very popular event probably started in 1997, the Runnin' Revs. It actually came from Chicago, but we have made it better. Msgr. Mike Mullen was the playing coach but now concentrates on strategy as coach only. Ed Sayers was the first coach of the "All Stars", to be followed by John Wissman. John has tried many times to get a few points from the Msgr. for a small bet. The chance the "All Stars" will win is like the chances someone will beat the Harlem Globe Trotters. It is also our only fund- raiser, with donations from those attending along with a live auction.

Two more Serra Clubs became active in 1998 and 1999. The Lawrence Club was primarily the brain child of Dr. Pretz. With the St. Lawrence center at K.U., he felt the Club could add support to vocations stemming from there. The problem was there were only two parishes in Lawrence to support the Club. Adding members was difficult. The Club tried to recruit from smaller towns near Lawrence with minimal success. Unfortunately, the Club became inactive.

Upon the encouragement of Archbishop Keleher our Club once again undertook the task of chartering another Club. It was felt it could be different from KCK in that it would have both men and women members, meet in the evening, and hopefully attract younger members. Under the leadership of Dale Putnam and John Wissman, after a successful informational meeting, Johnson County was chartered with 99 members, a very large membership for Serra. Mark Leadom joined them and was their first president. They continue to flourish.

So, we conclude our comments about the decade of the 90's. We are on the cusp of a new millennium. What exciting events await us? More to come.

Once again we wish to thank those who have helped us write this article. Especially Archbishop Keleher. Also, John Wissman, Dale Putnam, Ben Zarda, and most reliable John Jurcyk . Thank you all.