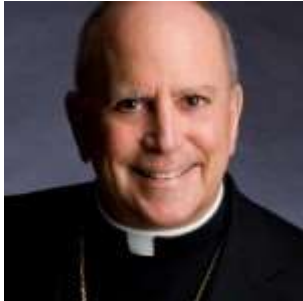


# How to cultivate contemporary vocations



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*This week we observe Vocations Awareness Week, a time set aside to promote awareness of the call to the priesthood, diaconate and religious life. These personal callings to become more closely united with Jesus are a blessing to those who receive them and to the community that is served by them.*

*In the spirit of this week, I would like to share excerpts with you from a talk that I gave to Colorado's Serra Club convention in mid-October. While this speech was delivered to Serrans, it can and should be read by any Catholic interested in fostering vocations.*

This evening I am going to present three efforts that I believe should be an integral part of any vocation promotion work today. Those initiatives are: Rooting your efforts in prayer and teaching young people to pray; using Jesus' discipleship model for introducing the idea and way of life of priests and religious to children; and learning from St. Junipero Serra's example of trust in Providence.

As practicing Catholics, we know that prayer is essential as the foundation for our life. Prayer puts us into relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who fill us with grace, sustain us daily, and lead us to eternal life. St. Therese of Lisieux is known for describing another, more emotional dimension of prayer.

"Contemplative prayer," she says, "is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us."

This is a significant challenge today, as the "still, small voice" of the Lord is often drowned out by the noise and constant stimulation present in our society. The competition for our attention is intense, which is why the practice of daily prayer and establishing a personal relationship with Christ are so important.

We Catholics are quite good at reciting written prayers, but an area where Serra Club members can be of service is teaching young men and women how to pray from the heart, or as St. Therese said, to engage in "a close sharing between friends." Perhaps this is not a way of speaking to God that you are used to, but it is certainly biblical.

If young men and women are going to hear God calling them to their vocation, then they will be greatly helped by learning how to relate to each Person of the Trinity in a personal way. Certainly, this is not something that you raise in your first conversation with them, but only after a friendship has been established. When the time does come, it can be as simple as asking, 'How do you pray?' This will naturally lead to sharing about your prayer life and perhaps an opening to ask if they would like to learn how to speak with God in a personal way.

This conversation I've just described, naturally leads to my second suggestion for creating a culture of vocations — adopting "the method modeled by the Master." This method of teaching and forming the 12 Apostles that Jesus employed was inspired by the Jewish system of education. In this system, young boys would study the Torah until their *bar mitzvah* and then ask different rabbis if they could become their disciples. Those who didn't get accepted as disciples would go into practicing a trade like fishing or carpentry.

During his three years of public ministry, Jesus found and called men to follow him who had failed to be accepted by a rabbi and were doing things like fishing or collecting taxes. Like other Jewish rabbis of his time, Jesus had the Apostles travel with him, eat with him, and learn from his actions.

But Jesus did far more than teach the Apostles, he performed miracles in their midst, drove out demons, and then sent them to do the same. He also gave them the power to forgive sins and the greatest treasure, the Holy Eucharist. The Apostles were not just students learning to become rabbis, they were made priests of Jesus Christ.

This model, based first on friendship, is one that should be used in vocations ministry. You may already be doing this by instinct, but if you aren't, you should be accompanying young men and women as mentors, showing them how you live the Christian life and charitably urging them to grow deeper in their relationship with the Lord.

Now, I realize that I am speaking to a group of committed Serrans, so I can't give this talk without speaking about St. Junipero Serra, your patron.

The first hallmark of St. Junipero's spirituality that should be adopted to promote vocations is his trust in God the Father's willingness to provide for him and those he was sent to serve. Rather than counting numbers, we should ask if we are being faithful to the Lord's calling for us, trusting that he will provide exactly what we need.

The second aspect of St. Junipero's spirituality is that in his first mission in the Sierra Gorda region, and then later in California, he steadfastly defended the interests of the natives entrusted to his care.

It's quite possible that one of the reasons St. Junipero was so adamant in opposing the colonial government attempts to take land and resources from the natives is that he experienced what it was like to be occupied by a foreign power where he grew up.

Similarly, the youth of today are facing what Pope Francis calls "ideological colonization," in which Christian cultures are being invaded by ideas, movements and trends that are decisively non-Christian. Take for example, the growing push for acceptance of gender ideology, which insists that one's gender is not God-given but self-determined. This is just one example of many.

The young men and women who are considering vocations and growing up in a culture that pushes anti-Christian ideals need to be taught the truth. They need to see witnesses of what it means to live as an authentic Catholic man or woman, in their parents, teachers, and those in the pews.

Encouraging vocations today is not easy work, but we know with God that all things are possible. The most important thing and the first step that every Serra Club should take is to begin or deepen your efforts to pray and to teach young people to pray. We must follow the command of Jesus, "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest" (Lk 10:2).

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