BELIEFS Values

Serra's new president initiates first summer garden party

BY RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

They worshipped under the shade of a backyard tent — their a capella singing as soft as the breeze on this hot summer day.

A Mass and prayers for religious vocations always initiate the semimonthly meetings of the Detroit-Oakland Serra Club, whose 65 members represent 20 parishes in the Birmingham/Bloomfield/Troy vicariate of the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit.

What made the July 15 meeting unique was the garden setting in the Bloomfield Hills home of Jim and Norma Pontius. And a gourmet meal featuring international cuisine like Beef Steak Singapore, Hong Kong BBQ Ribs, Pacific Pasta with Shrimp, South Sea Salad and Swedish Rice.

The chapter's first-of-its-kind Summer Garden Party was orchestrated by newly elected president Winnie Wong of West Bloomfield, a gourmet cook who spent 10 days preparing the dishes for the 80 guests in attendance.

"We have a woman's approach now," said party host Jim Pontius, a member of the male-dominated club for 30 years. "Winnie is a strong leader. She wants to see things happen."

The third of seven women to join Serra's Detroit-Oakland chapter, Wong was elected secretary within six months, vice president the following year and president last May.

"They promoted me fast," she said with a smile. "My immediate goal is to form another club in the Archdiocese and to get started on a club for younger people . . . I want to send Serra out to all parishes for vocations. And I want to make sure that all members are viable and active."

Born in Hong Kong under British rule, Wong was raised in China and became a U. S. citizen in 1973. She currently teaches theology at St. Mary College in Orchard Lake and uses her knowledge of five Chinese dialects to counsel immigrants and translate documents and posters.

The tri-cultural teacher's interest in the Serra Club was sparked when her brother became the first president of the chapter in Hong Kong. Once she learned the international organization was open to women, Wong quickly joined.

"It seems like we need more priests and religious people in the work force of the church," she said. "This is the age of the lay people, but we still need priests for sacramental life."

Wong has been working for vocations at the parish level as a long-time member of St. Hugo of the Hills church in Bloomfield Hills, where she also serves as lector, Eucharistic minister and director of volunteers. Her work with the Serra Club will now bring her heartfelt mission to new heights.

STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HOFFMEYER

Precious sacrament: Dorman Bell of Bloomfield Hills receives the consecrated body of Christ from Father Krieg, the club's chaplain.

"After taking care of my children, my belief is that I should serve God," said the mother of five grown children. "And the best way to serve God is to serve his people."

Catholic laymen interested in enhancing their spirituality and fostering vocations to religious life founded the Serra Club on the East Coast in 1932. The club was named in honor of Junipero Serra, a Spanish Franciscan missionary known for establishing a string of missions in California.

Founded in 1965, the Detroit-Oakland constituency is one of 687 chapters in 34 countries. Women have been active participants internationally for the last decade, and locally for five years.

"There's no reason to think that (men) have a monopoly on inspiring people to come to church," said Jerry Flanagan of Troy, past president of the local chapter. "The first real sponsor of a vocation is a mother, even more so than a dad. A mother's responsibility is for guiding her children and involving them in the formation of the church."

Most Serrans would agree that there is no surefire formula for gaining vocations.

"It's like throwing seeds out and waiting to see which ones are going to grow," said Pontius, an engineering consultant who attends St. Hugo of the Hills.

"One of our goals is to pick up on the Bishop's wishes to have vocation committees in all the parishes," said Flanagan, a retired Chrysler supervisor and member of Guardian Angels Church in Clawson. "We want to begin at the grass-roots level everywhere."

In addition to their prayers, members work to promote vocations in their respective parishes by placing prayers and meeting information in church bulletins, bringing the message to school children and encouraging and entertaining seminarians. There are currently 60 seminarians studying for the priesthood at Sts. Cyril and Methodious Seminary in Orchard Lake and 80 at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit.

"A vocation is such a precious gift that if you are able to get even one person to realize he or she is being called, it's a marvelous thing," said Flanagan.

The group also focuses on supporting priests and sisters in their daily lives. "We're not only promoting new vocations, but sustaining present vocations," said Pontius.

The Detroit-Oakland chapter of the Serra Club meets the first and third Tuesday of each month at the Manresa Retreat House in Bloomfield Hills. The evening of Mass, dinner and fellowship also features a prominent guest speaker. Members discuss feedback from the parish projects and become acquainted with the latest vocational programs of the Archdiocese. The group also holds an annual golf outing, Christmas party and a Charter night in May. The group is open to the Catholic laity and new members are always welcome.

"It's uplifting working with a group of very intelligent and interesting men and women interested in trying to promote vocations," said the Rev. Jerome Krieg, a priest for 60 years and chaplain of the group for 10. "The fellowship and friendship is very inspiring."

Addressing the guests at the Summer Garden Party, Wong added, "That's what Serra is all about . . . table fellowship, friendship and love."

For more information on the Serra Club, contact Winnie Wong at (248) 855-5706.

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SCOTTISH CONCERT

Christ Church Cranbrook, Cranbrook and Lone Pine roads, **Bloomfield Hills,** continues its free Carillon recital series at 4 p.m. Sunday, July 27, with a Highland Fling of Celtic pipes and drums joining Carillonneur Jenny King in an afternoon of music from the British Isles. Elegantly attired Scottish musicians will play dances, marches and songs in front of the church building and answer questions from the audience. For information, call (248) 644-5210.

ICE CREAM SOCIAL

An old-fashioned ice cream social with Ray's Ice Cream and entertainment by Banjoes of Michigan will take place from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, Aug. 1 at First United Methodist Church, 1589 W. Maple, **Birmingham.** The fare will include games for children. Tickets are $2 in advance and $2.50 at the door.

This 36th annual ice cream social is open to the community.

BIBLE SCHOOL

Join in a fun-filled 2.5 hours of games, puppets, music, story time, snacks and craft-making at "The King is Coming," a Vacation Bible School running from 6:30 to 9 p.m. Aug. 11 to 15 at William Tyndale College, 35700 W. 12 Mile, west of Drake, **Farmington Hills.** All kids ages 4 to 11 may register for the free program. Call (248) 478-5001 or (248) 851-2062. The program is an outreach of Oakland Hills Community Church.

JEWISH SCHOLARSHIPS

Applications are being taken for $500 Oakland Century B'nai Brith Scholarships. To apply, submit a grade transcript (no certification necessary) together with a typewritten memorandum in letter form demonstrating details of compliance with the following requirements. The applicant must be a Jewish student from the Detroit area who is now attending a college or university with at least one full year of credits toward a degree, who has superior scholarship, who demonstrates a need for financial assistance, who shows leadership qualities for the benefit of the Jewish community and whose campus activity shows established roots in Metropolitan Detroit. Mail applications by Sept. 1 to: Harold J. Samuels, chairman, Scholarship Committee, 26240 Inkster Road, **Southfield,** MI 48034. For information, call (248) 827-1919.

JEWISH EDUCATION

"Latte and Learning," an adult Jewish study group co-sponsored by Cong. B'nai Moshe and Cong. Beth Abraham Hillel Moses, both of **West Bloomfield,** meets from 10 to 11:30 a.m. on Mondays at Borders Books and Music in **Farmington Hills.** The Aug. 4 and 11 sessions, led by Rabbi Aaron Bergman, focus on an in-depth examination of the life and ideas of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. New students are cordially invited. The fee is $5 per session for members and $7 for non-members. For information, call Rita Abramson at (248) 788-0600.

VACATION BIBLE

Hope Lutheran Church, 39200 W. 12 Mile, just east of Haggerty, in **Farmington Hills,** is holding a Vacation Bible School Aug. 4-7. A light supper from 6:15 will be followed by music, crafts and Bible study until 8:30 p.m. This year's theme is "Be a Promise Builder for Jesus." Activities for kids from pre-school age to teens, plus an adult Bible class. To register, call (248) 553-7170.

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