



Serra International

Communications Manual

“Pray, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.” (Mt. 9:38)

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Introduction

“There Is No Story Until It Is Told”

The image of your Serra club and the degree of attention given to vocations in your community do not happen by chance. An image and a sense of urgency are created by design. A Serra club can achieve this with a sound public relations program.

Public relations differs from advertising in that public relations cannot be bought. It is the science of placing the organization and its goals before the eye of the public often through the news media. The impact of a club’s public relations and communications program should be to inform and educate your Catholic community about Serra’s objectives and that *all* Serra activities are designed to further the objectives.

Wide and informed knowledge of Serra will create a positive atmosphere to enable every Serran to better accomplish the objectives. In fact, a good communications program is the backbone of a Serra club and will benefit every club committee. “There is no story until it is told.”

Purpose

This manual is intended primarily for the club vice president for communications and other members of the communications committee. It also will be helpful to other club officers and to anyone associated with the club newsletter including the editor, the editorial board members and all members of the subcommittee. This manual is also an important reference for anyone involved in communications and public relations at any level of Serra.

Organizing an Effective Club Communications Committee

Successful Serra communications programs and activities depend on an effective and organized club communications committee. If you are tired of hearing your organization called the *Sierra* Club, adopt a communications program that will establish your own image. The following are some basic criteria and guidelines for developing and maintaining a working club communications committee.

Vice President for Communications

Responsibilities

- chair the club communications committee
- maintain the success of all club communications efforts
- develop a long-range plan for public relations with specific goals for the current year
- establish contacts with the local media — the Catholic newspaper editor, religious editors of secular newspapers and broadcast personnel. Approach these contacts with ideas for stories and keep them informed of Serra events
- keep the district informed of club events
- serve on the club board of trustees and alert members about ways their projects can promote public relations objectives
- develop a cadre of club spokespersons who are available to talk with the media as the need arises
- implement communications projects

Qualifications

- have professional experience in public relations, journalism or advertising

- have a keen interest in the position with the ability to learn the necessary skills
- be able to take the initiative in establishing contacts
- be able to write clearly and concisely
- be strongly convinced of the value of good communication

Club Communications Committee

Responsibilities

The primary responsibility of the club communications committee is to establish a comprehensive communications program and facilitate good communications on the club, district and international levels.

Structure

The size of the club's communications committee should be determined by the number and types of jobs to be done. There are specific responsibilities like producing a newsletter that may require a separate subcommittee with its own board or chair.

In general, the communications committee should consist of a sufficient number of people to accomplish the stated objectives. All committee members should be appointed on a rotating basis. Where deemed advantageous or appropriate, subcommittees may be established.

Composition

Members on the communications committee should:

- have special interests in public relations
- have the time and energy to work on press releases, newsletters or generating publicity
- have previous experience in public relations, journalism or advertising, if possible

Meetings

The committee should:

- meet monthly or more often in order to fulfill its responsibilities
- send notices of the meeting to the committee members in advance along with the proposed agenda
- keep and circulate adequate records

The committee also should work closely with the other club committees to gather ideas and information that can be used in public relations activities including preparing the club newsletter.

Resources

- *Communications Manual*
- *the SERRAN* magazine
- Diocesan directory
- Seminary directory
- Catholic encyclopedia
- National Catholic newspapers
- A book of saints' lives
- National Catholic News Service
- Diocesan newspapers

Public Relations (PR)

Internal PR: Share News With the Serra Community

- On the club level
 - distribute regular mailings, and
 - publish an informative newsletter.

- On the district level
 - keep the district governor and governor-elect informed of club news, and
 - regularly provide information for the district newsletter.

- On the international level
 - Use *the SERRAN* magazine as:
 - a continuing vehicle for dialogue on topics of current interest, and
 - a platform for sharing your club's achievements and activities with the worldwide network of Serra clubs.
 - Submit information from your club on an activity or item of interest which you would like to share with other Serrans to the editor of *the SERRAN*.
 - Include a black-and-white photo with your story if possible.
 - Keep in mind that *SERRAN* stories require seven weeks lead time.

External PR: Share News With the Community at Large

Public relations is the principal responsibility of the vice president for communications and his or her committee — sharing information about Serra's work and objectives with the community. The public image of your Serra club and local vocation awareness do not happen by chance. With good planning and some simple skills, you will be most successful in keeping Serra and vocations in the forefront of public awareness.

Four Steps to Good Public Relations

1. *Make Contacts*

- Some very important allies in your public relations program will be:
 - religion editors of local newspapers
 - editors of parish bulletins
 - editors of Catholic papers
 - broadcast and TV personnel
- You are important to the people you need to know. Editors and program directors are interested in getting to know you as a news source.
- Write, phone or visit editors in your area, especially the editors of your diocesan newspapers, parish bulletins and parish newsletters.
- Questions to ask each editor are:
 - When is the deadline for copy?
 - How should copy be presented?
 - Does the publication use photos?
 - Must they be black and white or does the editor also use color prints?
 - What size?
- Be prepared to answer their questions about general and specific programs of your Serra club for the coming year. In fact, bring along the current information folder to leave behind. Add a description of your own club's activities to the folder.
- Develop contacts with parish vocation committees and see that they receive appropriate information on the subject of vocations programs. Share Serra International releases and *SERRAN* articles. Aim to increase vocation awareness and acceptance in the parishes.
- Create a mailing list of your news contacts, titles, phone numbers, FAX numbers and exact e-mail and regular mail addresses for your file. Include your local Bishop, Serra International, and the Local National Council headquarters on your list.

2. *Gather Tools*

Effective "tools" for good publicity are:

- your list of media contacts' names and addresses;
- news media people who will supply you with guides to follow in preparing copy for them;
- a complete and accurate membership roster from your club secretary;
- a well-outlined program of important events and special projects for the whole club year;

- a date book to:
 - keep track of coming events
 - make notes of deadlines
 - plan future stories;
- printed news releases; and
- a scrapbook of your year's publicity as you go along.
 - keep clippings of newspaper stories in individual plastic sleeves, if possible.
 - add notes of radio and television publicity and any other media used.
 - use it as a tool to train your successor.

Keep all your tools in one place. You are then ready to meet with club officers at a moment's notice and are prepared to suggest the next step in the year's publicity program.

3. *Discern What is News*

Journalists work with two types of stories: news and features. News is time related, usually a specific event or something resulting from an event. A feature is not time related, often an interview, human-interest story or a more in-depth article on an issue rather than an event.

Not everything a Serra club does is news. But a lot of things taking place regularly will be news for at least one medium. Here are some of them:

- The election of club officers or the appointment of a chaplain.
- The club's yearly schedule of programs with the central theme, if there is one.
- The appointment of any committee chairpersons or members.
- Advance stories on any special anniversaries and club activities being planned to observe them, e.g., Serra International Founder's Day or your charter night.
- Advance stories on any special events:
 - a run for vocations,
 - the "Called By Name" program,
 - an appreciation dinner for sisters, and
 - any other external projects.
- Presentation of an award to a club member (e.g. "Outstanding Serran") or to the club (e.g., the Fr. Junipero Serra Award).
- District, area and international meetings and conventions at which members of your club will be attending.

These suggestions should give you an idea of what kind of information concerning your regular activities will be of interest to your various news sources. There will be other suggestions developing as your club program develops:

- new projects,
- outstanding speakers for a club meeting or other event,
- competitions with other outstanding speakers for a club meeting or other event,
- competitions with other clubs,
- community service projects, and
- special honors accorded to a Serran.

4. *Get Your Story to the Right Audience*

It has been said that the difference between the amateur publicist and the professional is that the amateur thinks of the *story* while the professional thinks of the *audience*.

Decide what audience you wish to reach:

- Do you want to make Serra better known in the club area?
- Do you want to build membership in the club?
- Do you want to motivate lay people to work for vocations?
- Do you need support from the general public for a fund-raising venture?

- Do you want to sell Catholic pastors of the area on the worth and accomplishments of your club?
- Do you want the general public to know how Serra works to create a more Christian atmosphere in the community?

When you have decided this, relate your story to the interest of the audience that you are seeking to influence. Then concentrate your efforts on the news media that will reach that audience.

The Mechanics of Publicity

What Is a News Release?

- A news release is the story you write to let the media know about your club news. Using news releases makes the task easier both for you and for the editor.
- You are able to send the story to many newspapers, radio stations or television stations.
- The editor receives a story already written that can easily be adapted to suit his or her needs.
- At times it will be appropriate to follow up a news release with a phone call to the editors to offer any additional assistance.

Writing a News Release

- Five points are important in a correctly prepared news release: WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN and WHY. If possible, a sixth, HOW, should be included. Get all of these points into the lead of your story.
- Go into the details of your story. Each succeeding paragraph should follow the inverted pyramid method and be of declining importance.
- Use short words. Write short sentences, short paragraphs. Two or three sentences make a good paragraph in a news release.
- Be brief. Almost every news release can be written on one or two double-spaced, typewritten pages that will fill about 12 inches or one newspaper column width. This is a lot more space than most editors can give one item.
- Always give an exact date in a news release: "June 10" rather than "next Thursday" or "Tomorrow." Specify "October," not "next month." Double check dates and days of the week on a calendar.
- List the address as well as the name of a meeting place.
- Never use jargon. Be conscious of expressions Serrans commonly use like:
 - "University of Christian Principles."
- Always spell out numbers from one to nine, then use numerals from 10 on up.
- Never begin a sentence with numerals.
- When you have finished the draft of your story, go over it and cross out all the unnecessary words. Then type it up for transmission.
- Check every point of your story for accuracy. Never guess on dates, times, places or names.

Typing a News Release

- News releases should always be typed.
- Double space all copy.
- Leave ample margins and type on one side of the paper only.
- Indent at least five spaces for paragraphs.
- Never send carbon copies. Send photocopies instead.
- When identical, individually typed releases are sent out; be sure to list at the top of the release just which newspapers and broadcast outlets are getting identical stories.
- Be sure to keep a copy of every release you send out. Record which media you sent it to.
- Give full reference data in the upper left-hand corner of the first page. This can be single spaced. List the name of your Serra club, your name, street address, city and phone number

- Type the release date in the upper right-hand corner.
- Stipulate "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" if at all possible. This means the editor or broadcaster can use it at once. If you must ask for a specific publication date, it should read "RELEASE AFTER 4:00 P.M., Tuesday, June 10, 2003 . . ." "Hold" releases complicate an editor's task, so avoid "Hold" whenever possible.
- Start your copy one-third of the way down the first page. The editor needs this space left open so he or she can write a headline for your story and give other instruction.
- If your story must run more than one page, write "more" at the bottom of each page except the last. Always end each page with a complete sentence and paragraph.
- When your release runs more than one page, type your club name at the top of each succeeding page. Drop down one inch below this and continue your story.
- Type "XXX" or "-30-" under the final paragraph of the news release.
- Request a style sheet from the local newspapers and follow the editorial style carefully.
- Check your news release for accuracy in typing. Make sure all names, dates, hours and places are correct.
- Never staple the pages of a news release. They must be separated in the news room and may be torn in the process. Paper clip if necessary.

Photos

- Most newspapers will accept and print photos based on their news value.
- Submit black-and-white photos. (Many papers will also use color prints.)
- Plan action photos. They will capture the interest of the editor and the readers.
- Photographers, like reporters, are always treated as guests at any function they cover. If food is served, offer it to the photographer.
- Attach captions to any photographs you submit.
- Never use a paper clip and never write on the back of the photo. Either of these will likely damage the print finish, spoiling it for reproduction.

Public Service Announcements

The radio or television public service announcement (PSA) is a way your club can announce events of public interest. The PSA should be:

- typed and double spaced,
- on 8½" x 11" white paper,
- with your name and phone number in the right-hand corner.

Include the length of time of the announcement in seconds. To determine length, read your PSA aloud. (Most PSAs are 10 to 20 seconds.) For television use, include a color slide.

Other Ways to Share Serra With the Community

Personal Public Relations

Every Serran is needed to help further the objectives of Serra through his or her personal actions. A few words spoken to an acquaintance about vocations at a social gathering or a short chat about Serra with a business associate can have a great impact. Each Serran needs to be aware that he or she is Serra to the people he or she knows and that it is important to talk about Serra with friends and acquaintances.

Sometimes even veteran Serrans have a difficult time responding briefly and clearly to the often-asked question, "What is Serra?" The vice president for communications and his or her committee should remind club members to have a simple, clear answer prepared. Brief examples help describe the rather complex concept of Serra:

"What is Serra?"

- “Serra is a Catholic organization of laypersons concerned with vocations — priesthood and the religious life. Our Serra club, among other activities, sponsors an annual vocation discernment retreat for young adults and hosts a colloquium at the university on business ethics.”
- “Serra is a Catholic organization for laypersons. We belong to different parishes, but we are all interested in the future of ministry in the church. We prepare and distribute a vocation calendar every year and try to encourage parishioners to pray for vocations.”
- “Serra is a lay Catholic organization that promotes vocations to the ministerial priesthood and religious life and an appreciation of religious life, and helps me to be a better informed layperson. Speakers at our meetings discuss current issues in the church, and we are forming vocation awareness committees in every parish in the area.”

Club members also should have some knowledge of Father Junipero Serra (“*Yu-ni-pa-ro*”) and be able to pronounce his name properly.

Speakers Bureau

Some Serra clubs have a speakers bureau and make arrangements for their own members as well as other contacts to speak to other organizations, parishes and schools. The speaking engagements spread the news about Serra and the need for vocations.

Videotapes

The committee should compile a list of useful videos, especially on vocations, available from various organizations. The vice president or a committee member should be familiar with video equipment.

Serra International Communications Committee

The Serra International Communications Committee was created by the Serra International Board in 1984 because of a growing need for communications. The members of the committee have expertise or an interest in communications and represent clubs around the world. The committee considers and plans communications projects that will benefit Serra, internationally, nationally and locally. Also, at each International convention the committee members present a workshop to help Serrans with club communications projects.

The International Communications Committee will present a "Share Serra" award to a club with an outstanding communications effort during the year. Details will be mailed to each club in January along with information on other awards, including the "Outstanding Newsletter Award" offered by Serra International.

15 Ways to Create Serra News

1. Tie in with news events of the day.
2. Issue a report. For example, compare the number of theology students in your diocese today with the number five years ago.
3. Arrange an interview with a celebrity, perhaps your bishop or a visiting member of the Serra International Board of Trustees.
4. Arrange for a newsworthy speaker at a meeting.
5. Announce names of new club officers.
6. Celebrate an anniversary — your club's charter night, Serra International Founder's Day.

7. Present an award. Honor a local priest who has had an impact on vocations or an exemplary Catholic in business.
8. Hold a contest. Essay and poster contests are traditional, but consider a "Run for Vocations," a song-writing competition or a golf tournament for priests.
9. Tie into a well-known week or day, such as Catholic Schools Week, Vocation Awareness Week, World Day of Prayer for Vocations or even Labor Day.
10. Fete an institution. Give special honor to a corporation that offers Mass during lunch hour or an outstanding local school.
11. Hold a seminar or workshop that would interest the community. Or sponsor a parish or school "Careers With Christ" night.
12. Adapt national vocation reports and surveys locally.
13. Organize a tour of the local seminary.
14. Have members speak on vocations at parish or civic gatherings.
15. Organize a vocation pilgrimage.

Publishing a Serra Club Newsletter

The following suggestions are intended to make publishing a Serra club newsletter less intimidating for those who are responsible for producing it: the volunteer editor, communications vice president or club secretary. Because many communications vice presidents and newsletter editors have seldom had previous experience in communications work or newsletter writing, this information is meant to be a useful tool in starting and maintaining a club newsletter.

There are additional topics listed that may enhance a newsletter and improve its overall communicative depth, but they are listed as thought-starters, not as requirements. Individual newsletter layout, style and coverage will vary greatly and are only limited by the creativity and effort of the editor.

Materials Needed

- Serra International logo, and/or club newsletter logo
- Coverage of meetings held including the speaker and the topic
- A calendar of upcoming meetings or events including time and place of club meetings
- Short reflection from the chaplain
- Club election of officers when held
- Any local news involving the club or club members
- Club committee reports of importance

Setting Objectives

The board (which includes the vice president for communications) and the newsletter editor (if he/she is other than the communications vice president) should establish the objectives for having a newsletter.

They may be:

- to inform all members of upcoming meetings and events (date, location, time, speakers, etc.)
- to report on meetings and events already held including a summary of the programs presented

- to serve members who were unable to attend some meetings and thereby help them feel more a part of the club
- to develop pride and esprit de corps among club members
- to be helpful in recruiting new members
- to communicate with the clergy and the religious of the area on the activities of Serra
- to spread district and international Serra news
- to be a medium for spiritual and motivational messages for club members
- to provide timely information on subjects of interest to Serrans including vocations and personal spiritual growth

How-to

- Establish a budget based on
 - what funds are available,
 - cost of production, and
 - circulation of the newsletter.
- Decide on the method/type of printing
 - may be negotiated with a small print shop
 - may be printed by a quick print shop
 - may negotiate the use of the copying equipment of the diocesan or parish office if located near you
 - check into a member Serran having the newsletter printed or copied at his/her place of business
- Decide on circulation
 - Who should receive the newsletters will determine how many need to be printed. Consider:
 - club membership and present and past chaplains
 - priests of the area
 - diocesan and other religious in the area (include deacons, seminarians, etc.)
 - directors of the diocesan religious
 - communication vice presidents of the other district clubs
 - Catholic retirement homes
 - Serra International and Local National Council offices
 - your district governor
 - your regional director
 - How should they be delivered?
 - folded in half or thirds?
 - stapled?
 - stuffed in envelopes?
 - What is the appropriate postal rate?
 - bulk mail (there are requirements based on the number of pieces to qualify for bulk rate)
 - regular mail
- Decide on production
 - Who will write the articles?
 - the editor
 - club officers
 - club chaplain
 - club members
 - speakers from club meetings
 - local priests or religious
- How will it be designed?
 - Type text on:
 - typewriter or
 - computer-based design or word processing program like:
 - PageMaker
 - QuarkXPress
 - WordPerfect

- Microsoft Word
- Microsoft Publisher
- Do your own or have a print company do your layout
- Arrange for reproduction and distribution including mailing as appropriate

Sources of Newsletter Content

Everyone asks, "Where do you find 'news' to put in a newsletter?" The following list is an unlimited source of newsletter material with which the editor will then be able to apply the journalism cardinal rules of Who, What, When, Where, Why and How.

Sources of news

- reports on completed club meeting and events
- articles on future club meetings and events
- a "look ahead" calendar of upcoming events, meetings, speakers, etc., of interest to Serrans (this could include churches, colleges and organizations in the community)
- club president's message
- club chaplain's message
- news from other Serra clubs
- Serra International/Local National Council news and events
- Serra district and regional news and events
- club member profiles
- miscellaneous pertinent excerpts (e.g., vocations, personal spiritual growth) from other media sources; Catholic papers, magazines, *the SERRAN* magazine, radio, television
- cartoons
- local parish news if it pertains to vocations or other Serra interests
- statistics from the diocesan newspaper or other media
- editorial comments (exercise caution in using editorials — not unanimously recommended)
- pictures of speakers, visitors, events. Black-and-white film is recommended for the best overall production quality. Pictures can be a very valuable part of a newsletter. Find someone who is willing to regularly take pictures wherever possible.
- local Catholic parish vocation activities/school/college miscellaneous items of interest
- pertinent community events and speakers
- seminary information
- club committee reports — finance, membership, vocations, communications, programs, and any other committees
- club committee structure showing member assignments
- club officer elections
- letters to the editor
- book reviews
- articles from a club's history files
- coverage of local religious orders
- retirements of clergy, priest, deacon, sister and brother
- diocesan programs (Called By Name, adult education series, ordinations, etc.)
- news about members and their families
- promotion of Blessed Junipero Serra to be recognized as a saint
- anniversaries of when club members joined
- profiles of saints
- prayer texts, especially those relative to vocations
- Vocation Office information

Evaluating Your Club Communications Committee

From time to time the communications committee should rate their program as "S" (Strong), "A" (Average) or "W" (Weak) on the list of statements which follow:

1. The communications program is headed by a capable, dedicated chairperson (the vice president for communications).
2. There are at least three committee members, appointed on a continuing basis.
3. The committee meets monthly and conducts meeting efficiently.
4. At its meetings, the committee has an agenda and completes it.
5. The committee uses this *Communications Manual* as a resource in its planning of communications programs.
6. The committee coordinates its public relations efforts with various media in the area.
7. The committee develops a long-range plan for public relations with specific goals for the current year.
8. The committee periodically evaluates its progress on achieving the goals for the current year.
9. The chair establishes contacts with the local media and the committee members maintain these contacts.
10. The committee approaches media contacts with ideas for stories and keeps them informed of Serra events.
11. The club members are well informed of club events on a regular basis.
12. The district is well informed of club events on a regular basis.
13. The committee maintains a list of club spokespersons who are available to talk with the media as the need arises.
14. The committee implements communications projects developed by the Serra International Communications Committee and the Local National Council Communications Committee.
15. If available, e-mail communications are used effectively to reach those online.

Appendix A

Serra International Suggested Club

Position Description for the Club Vice President of Communications

Position Title:	Vice President of Communications
Reports To:	President
Position:	Attend all Board and Committee meetings and functions; serves as the Chair of the Club Communications Committee; formulate plans and make recommendations to the Board of Trustees for the improvement of internal and external communications and public

relations.

Principal Responsibilities:

1. Attend all Club and Board of Trustee meetings
2. Serve on the Club Board of Trustees
3. Serve as the Chairperson of the Communications Committee
4. Assist and attend Regional and District Conventions as appropriate
5. Establish comprehensive communication programs for use by the clubs
6. Develop a long range plan for the Communications Committee
7. Attend and actively participate in the Spring Leadership Planning Conference
8. Assist the President Elect in the preparation of the budget.
9. Understand the responsibilities of the board president and be able to perform these duties in the president's absence
10. Participate as vital part of the Club leadership
11. Perform such other duties as may be assigned by the President and/or the Board of Trustees

Position Requirements:

1. Thorough knowledge of Serra International and its Objectives and Purposes
2. Ability to work collaboratively with volunteers

Desirable Knowledge, Skills and Abilities:

1. Knowledge of current Catholic Church issues
2. Ability to communicate clearly and concisely orally and in writing