



Savannah Serra Club NEWSLETTER

March 2005

Paul Thigpen Tells the Georgia Martyrs' Story



"When most students study Georgia History, it begins with James Oglethorpe founding Georgia by establishing a colony here in Savannah in 1733," said Dr. Paul Thigpen as he began his talk at our meeting on February 19, 2005. What is not often mentioned is that the Catholic faith was first planted in this area in the late 1500s by Spanish Franciscan missionaries who came here by way of St. Augustine, Florida. In fact, due to their efforts, by 1565 there were tens of thousands of native Catholics in what is now Georgia and Florida.

On September 8, 1565, the day St. Augustine was founded, a Thanksgiving mass was celebrated. Afterwards, the soldiers shared a meal, probably including wild turkey, with the Indians. This was actually the first Thanksgiving feast celebrated in America, more than 50 years before the pilgrims even landed in Plymouth. It was also more than 200 years before Blessed Junipero Serra founded his first mission in California.

Ultimately, friars, who had been sent out from their regional headquarters in St. Augustine, established a chain of missions from what is now Parris Island, SC, in the north all the way down to the Florida keys, and across to what is southwest Georgia and the Florida panhandle. Five Franciscan missionaries did much of this work, spreading the faith among the Guale nation that inhabited coastal Georgia: Frays Pedro De Corpa, Blas Rodriguez, Miguel de Anon, Antonio De Badajoz and Francisco de Verascola. They came without soldiers to evangelize the native people, far from the protection of the Governor and the garrison. They constructed mission settlements, offered Mass, preached and baptized, and by 1597 there were over 1500 Christians living along the Georgia coast.

The native Americans whom they came to convert practiced polygamy. The friars insisted that those who had been baptized and promised to be faithful to Jesus' teaching on marriage could not break that promise and go back to practicing polygamy. Ultimately tensions over this issue developed between the cultures. Within a period of several days, in September 1597, these five friars gave their lives in testimony to the Christian ideal of marriage.

Today these servants of God are proposed as heavenly patrons and intercessors for those who are seeking to be faithful to Christ's teaching on marriage. Their canonization is sought as a tribute to the people of the Guale nation and in recognition of the contribution of the Hispanic peoples whose ancestors came to America to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

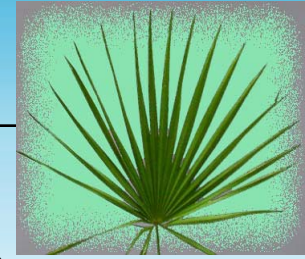
"Why should we study the Georgia martyrs and what do they mean to the Serra Club?" Paul asked.

First of all, so that we tell the truth and set the historical record straight.

Second, to support vocations. We can learn about these courageous men who followed their vocation and shed their blood to serve God and spread the faith.

Finally, we should pray to them for intervention to help our current priests, for new priests as well as for marriage and families.





And we should pray that men and women, who may have a vocation, but haven't answered it yet, hear the call.

It is also important for the many new Hispanic people coming into our diocese to realize that the Spanish were the first Catholics in this area, long before the colony of Georgia was founded. Hearing this story, they can be inspired to know that Hispanic Catholic culture has a heroic heritage in our diocese.

Those who are interested in joining the Friends of the Georgia Martyrs, a new association established to promote the cause for their canonization, should contact Paul Thigpen at georgiamartyrs@comcast.net.

—Peter Paolucci

Serra Club Engages Parishes

After spending the past several years trying to foster vocations, it seems apparent that the problem of not enough priestly vocations cannot be delegated to some outside vocations group. It can't be considered a marginal activity, but must be fully incorporated into the life and activity of the parish community. It is a vital problem, which lies at the very heart of the Church and must be at the heart of the love that each Christian feels for the Church.

Parish communities need to be encouraged to accept their responsibility for promoting and calling forth vocations. They can make an

important contribution by prayer and sufferings offered up for priestly and religious vocations. But each parish should also try to create a culture which encourages and supports vocations.

In order to promote parish vocation activities, the Vocations Committee has developed a discussion, which they plan to present to various Parish Councils in the Savannah Deanery. In early February, they met with the council at St. Peter the Apostle. During the discussion they reviewed the vocation activities that were currently underway in the parish and suggested some proven programs, which could be adopted. The Serra Club offered to act as a vocation resource to help the parish establish a culture of vocations in their midst. Subsequent sessions are planned with other parishes in the deanery.

—Peter Paolucci

Vocation Essay Contest Winners Announced

Joe Hasbrouck, VP-Vocations, announced the winners of the Vocation Essay Contest at the meeting on Saturday as follows:

Parochial Schools

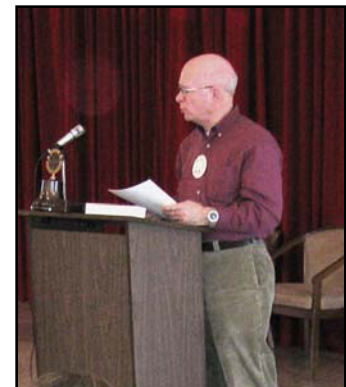
- 1st Place - Katie Pagan - St. Peter the Apostle School
- 2nd Place - Sean Lavrisa - St. James School
- 3rd Place - Rachel Lynn Frank - St. James School

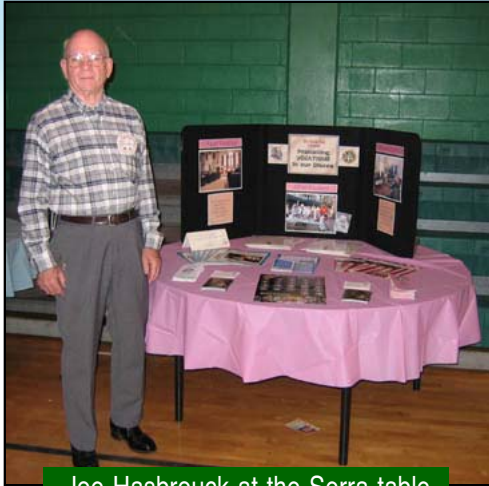
CCD Programs

- 1st Place - Michelle Demasi - St. Peter the Apostle
- 2nd Place - Teresa Samaras - St. Peter the Apostle

The winners, their parents and teachers will be invited to the March 19, 2005, Serra Club Meeting, where they will be presented with the \$100 U. S. Savings Bond prize.

The Essay Contest was for seventh grade students in both the Parochial schools and CCD programs in the Savannah Deanery. They were required to write an essay of 200 words on "Where Is Jesus Today?"





Joe Hasbrouck at the Serra table

Serra Club Participates in Stewardship Fair

Blessed Sacrament Parish held a Stewardship Fair in their gym after all the Masses on February 19 and 20, 2005. It was an opportunity for parishioners to learn what makes Blessed Sacrament such a vibrant faith community and to get more information about the many aspects of parish life. Numerous parish ministries as well as some outside groups participated including: RCIA, Boy and Girl Scouts, Choir, CCW and many more. Each group manned a table in the gym and had a display

board and handouts. Coffee, juice, and doughnuts were served.

It was a good opportunity for the Serra Club of Savannah to make Blessed Sacrament parishioners aware of our ministry as well as create awareness for the vocations issue. In addition, we described various programs which could be implemented in the parish to promote vocations. This is the second ministry fair in which the club has participated. In August 2004, Our Lady of Lourdes held a similar event and 3 new Serra Club Members directly resulted from our presence.

—Peter Paolucci.

Serra Club of Savannah Nominates Officers

On Saturday, February 19, 2005, the Nominating Committee proposed the following slate of Officers to serve from June 1, 2005 through May 31, 2006.

President	Byron Stephens
President Elect	Joe Hasbrouck
VP Programs	Marilyn Stephens
VP Membership	Suzanne Aviles
VP Vocations	Joe Hasbrouck
VP Communications	Peter Paolucci
Secretary	Josie Lee
Treasurer	Marilyn Stephens
Trustees	Frank Saponaro
	Julio Aviles
	Alex Guira
Past President	Don Waters

Dear Members of the Serra Club,

Greetings from Rome and a blessed Lenten season to you all! I just wanted to take the time to thank all of you for your continued prayers and support that you have shown me and the other seminarians of the Diocese of Savannah. We are just beginning our 2nd semester of studies here. Thank you again for your prayers and support! May God's blessing be upon you all!

In Christ,

Justin Ferguson



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