



The Serra Club of Arlington
Minutes for Tuesday 07 February 2023 | Luncheon Meeting
The Portofino Restaurant | Arlington, Virginia



GUEST SPEAKER – BISHOP JOSEPH L. COFFEY, ARCHDIOCESE FOR THE MILITARY SERVICES - VICAR FOR VETERANS AFFAIRS

Bishop Joseph L. Coffey, son of the late Dr. William F. X Coffey, M.D., and Roseanita Schubert Coffey, was born in Rochester, MN, on May 31, 1960. He is the fifth of nine children and the proud uncle of 46 nieces and nephews and 12 great nieces and nephews. He was raised in Philadelphia, and is a life-long fan of all the Philly sports teams.

Bishop Coffey graduated from La Salle University in 1982 with a double major in English/French which included a year of study at the Sorbonne University in Paris, France. After college, Bishop Coffey worked as a grade school teacher, a ski instructor in Switzerland, and in the automobile industry in Germany and Belgium for five years.

Heeding a call to the priesthood, he attended St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia, PA, and graduated with a Master of Divinity degree (M.Div.) and was ordained in 1996 by Anthony Cardinal Bevilacqua. He earned a Master of Arts (MA) in Moral Theology, also from St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in 2000.

While still in seminary, Father Coffey was given permission by Cardinal Bevilacqua to enter the U.S. Navy Chaplain Candidate Program in May of 1992 with the rank of Ensign. He stayed in the Navy Reserve for the next nine years.

Following ordination in 1996, Bishop Coffey was assigned as an Associate Pastor to St. Katherine of Siena parish in Philadelphia, PA. After five years in parish ministry, he was given permission by Cardinal Bevilacqua for full-time active duty as a Navy Chaplain in September of 2001.

Bishop Coffey's duty assignments have included: Combat Assault Battalion, Okinawa, Japan; Division Officer and Command Chaplain on board USS GEORGE WASHINGTON (CVN 73), homeported in Norfolk, VA, with a 6-month deployment to the Arabian Gulf; Command Chaplain at the U.S. Coast Guard Training Center, Cape May, NJ; Marine Air Group 39, Camp Pendleton, CA, an assignment that included a seven-month deployment to Camp Leatherneck, Helmand Province, Afghanistan; U.S. Navy Recruiting Command, St. Louis, MO; Command Chaplain on USS RONALD REAGAN (CVN 76), home ported in Yokosuka, Japan, with a six-month deployment to the South Pacific Ocean; and his final assignment as Assistant Chief of Staff for Religious Ministry, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, CA.

Bishop Coffey's military awards include the Meritorious Service Medal, the Navy Commendation Medal with 2 gold stars, the Navy Achievement Medal with 2 gold stars, the Navy Sea Service Medal, the National Defense Medal, the War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the War on Terrorism Service Medal, and the NATO Service Medal, 3 Battle E Ribbons.

Highlights: Bishop Coffey's talk was a recap of his journey in his service as part of the Archdiocese of Military Services (*as per the above*). Below are some of the memories:

- 28 years in the Navy of which 19 years was active duty.
- Serra prayer shared with family before meal while growing up. Attributes this as the proof positive that prayer "works."
- Five years as parish priest before active duty in the Navy.

- Tours included: 3 years with Marines; 2 years on aircraft; and 1 year as recruiter.
- Tours of duty with and “RP” (*Religious Program Specialist*). He was considered a “noncombatant” and, as such, his only “weapon” was his Rosary.
- Noted that Military Chaplains are either “in conus” (*chapel on base*) or “operational” (*on tour*)
- Views his service as a “vocation within a vocation.”
- Memories of:
 - Hiking in Okinawa with double backpacks in the pouring rain. Attributed his mental toughness as being able to finish
 - Training as part of a “gas mask” drill, which was interrupted by the September 11th, 2001 attack. At that point he realized “we’re going to war.”
 - In Iwo Jima, hiked on his own up to the top of Mt Suribachi (*iconic American flag raising image*) where he said his own private Mass.