



**CATHOLIC
HOME
MISSIONS**

Faith Blooms in the Desert



St. Joseph Church at Laguna Pueblo.

By Beth Griffin

Catholicism has deep and well-established roots in the arid Southwestern Diocese of Gallup. The faith, brought by Franciscans almost five hundred years ago, has been nourished by generations of men and women. Today, it is still strong, but faces daunting challenges because of geography, the economy, and its small and widely dispersed population.

“People here have been Catholic for a long time, but we’re still a mission diocese

because the territory is so large, the resources are so limited, and the people are so few,” describes Deacon Timoteo Lujan. He has served in many capacities during his nineteen years as a deacon and is currently the Co-Director of the Office of Deacon Formation for the diocese.

“The heritage of our faith is more than 400 years old, with rich cultural diversity including

Native Americans and Hispanics . . . at the same time, we struggle with third-world conditions,” the deacon says.

The Diocese of Gallup, which receives funds from Catholic Home Missions, spans 55,000 square miles in northwest New Mexico and northeast Arizona. It was established in 1939 to serve the Indian reservations in the two states. Seventy percent of the area of the diocese is comprised of the Navajo, Hopi, Zuni, Acoma, Laguna, White Mountain Apache, and Jicarilla reservations. Native

Americans represent half the Catholic population.

The starkly beautiful land is largely desert. And, aside from the cities of Gallup and Farmington, New Mexico, the diocese is rural. Two-lane highways and dirt roads connect people to one another and their remote parishes. These vast distances and open spaces between parishes and missions must be factored into ministry decisions involving staffing and scheduling.

There is no predominant industry and the land is too dry for significant farming or ranching. The major employers are railroads, refineries, government entities, medical facilities, and schools.

Gallup is an economically stressed diocese in an area that knows grueling poverty. Unemployment in the region is high and reaches 70 percent on the reservations. In some places, 40 percent of families live below the federal poverty line. Many people live in substandard housing and lack both electricity and running water.

...continued on page 2

Neighbors

WINTER 2014

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear Friends,

Located in New Mexico and Arizona, the Diocese of Gallup serves Catholics spread across 55,000 square miles. Half of its Catholics are Native Americans from several different

tribes. Many of the Native American Catholic communities have existed for more than 400 years, since Spanish explorers and friars began to arrive in 1539. The Native American population offers many rich cultural traditions, which are often expressed in the Mass and in community celebrations. The people are eager to continue learning more about their faith and many families send their children to one of the twelve Catholic schools in the diocese.

The Diocese of Gallup faces a shortage of priests. Many dioceses in the United States are blessed with numerous priests, such that several priests might serve at a single parish. However, in Gallup, many of the parishes share a priest. This requires a well-trained staff of lay ministers and religious educators who can supplement the needs of the people for religious formation and nourishment. Deacons also play a huge role in working with priests to minister to the people.

Faced with the eagerness of people to live their faith, the diocese struggles with not having the resources to meet their needs for the sacraments and catechesis. The limited number of priests must travel long distances over poor roads in order to reach people.

This year, Catholic Home Missions provided a grant to the Diocese of Gallup that will assist them with youth ministry, lay ministry and diaconal formation, summer religious education sessions, and the cost of maintaining Catholic schools.

We are able to make this grant because of the great generosity of Catholics like you, who willingly give each year to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal. I offer you both my thanks for your financial support and a request for continued prayers. With your help, we will continue to support our neighbors in struggling dioceses like Gallup. Together, we can strengthen our Church at home.

In gratitude,

Bishop Peter F. Christensen
Diocese of Superior

...continued from page 1

The diocese offers hope in the form of material and spiritual support delivered through a network of fifty parishes, twenty-four missions, and twelve schools. There are approximately 62,000 Catholics in a population of half a million people. Church facilities are spread far apart and staffed by people who fill many roles, according to Deacon Lujan. As an example, he described how two priests and two deacons cover three parishes and a large mission. The pastor works with on-site deacons, religious, and lay volunteers who catechize the parishioners and help administer the parishes. “The biggest challenge in the diocese is resources,” Deacon Lujan says.

On the bright side, the diocese is blessed with people of different cultures who are united in their love for the Catholic faith. Suzanne Hammons, diocesan Media Coordinator, says the Navajos incorporate their vibrant cultural traditions into Masses and festive celebrations that follow them. Hispanics are a smaller group within the diocese, but there are well-attended, weekly Spanish-language Masses in ten parishes.

People are eager to understand and share their faith, Deacon Lujan says. Religious formation of the laity is a priority for the diocese, which has built upon programs initially established for educating the many

women religious who serve in Gallup. “We have invested, to the best extent possible, in certificate programs for lay ministers and we require certification for parish roles such as pastoral administrator, catechist, and director of religious education,” the deacon explains.

In Gallup, eleven Catholic elementary schools and one high school are centers for learning, evangelization, and catechesis. The school system was established by Saint Katherine Drexel in the late 1890’s to provide Catholic instruction to Navajo children. The schools today offer their students a traditional Catholic education and provide sacramental formation for families and mission outreach to neighbors.

“The schools are a primary form of evangelization and offer a huge opportunity to reach out to non-Catholic students and families sympathetic to the message of the Church,” says Suzanne.

Parishes and schools work together to share the faith—laity, religious, and permanent deacons actively support a small number of priests, Deacon Lujan says. The Gallup diaconate is particularly strong and has the distinction of being one of the first formed after the permanent diaconate was re-established in the United States more than forty years ago.

“Deacons are a normal part of the Church and have always been here,”

in the experience of most parishioners, Deacon Lujan says. Deacons fill parish and diocesan leadership positions and also take care of wedding and baptismal preparation and funeral arrangements. “Deacons need to be very flexible and do a wide variety of things,” he says.



Groundbreaking for a new parish hall at St. Francis Church in Gallup with Bishop James S. Wall (center).



On November 30, 2013, one seminarian was ordained to the transitional diaconate at Sacred Heart Cathedral in Gallup. He will become a priest next year.

There are twenty-nine permanent deacons serving in Gallup. They are either retired from secular jobs or combine their diaconal responsibilities with outside employment. Deacon Lujan, who holds a degree in theology, is a shift supervisor in a coal-fired power plant. He says there are four to six men preparing for the diocesan diaconate in most years, but other potential candidates are not “in a financial situation where they can afford to put in a bunch of extra time” to train and serve. As a result, Native Americans and Hispanics are underrepresented in the diaconate, Deacon Lujan says.

Vocations to the priesthood have increased under the leadership of Bishop James S. Wall, who was appointed to head the Diocese of Gallup in 2009. Five diocesan seminarians are studying for the priesthood at seminaries in Colorado, Connecticut, and Ohio. One is scheduled to be ordained in spring 2014.

Bishop Wall says he wants the diocese to experience “an increased embrace of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. My hope for the people entrusted

to my care is that they encounter the living Christ, experience a conversion of heart, and are drawn into a deeper communion with the Triune God.”

Catholic Home Missions provides vital funding to the Diocese of Gallup. Offertory collections do not cover costs for most parishes and missions or for the diocesan-wide operations of the chancery office.

“The diocese of Gallup is one of the poorest dioceses in the United States. Without the generous contribution of Catholic Home Missions’ funds each year, necessary catechetical programs might not be possible,” Bishop Wall says. ■



The new Superintendent, Jeanette Suter, meets with students and teachers at St. Francis School in Lumberton, NM.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The Diocese of Gallup includes parts of Arizona and New Mexico, covers two time zones, and crosses the Continental Divide.
- At 55,000 square miles, the diocese is roughly the size of the state of New York. Catholics comprise about 13 percent of the total population of 495,000, but are spread so far apart there are only 1.5 Catholics per square mile.
- Native Americans are the largest ethnic group of Catholics in the diocese, followed by Caucasians and Hispanics.
- The diocese includes the largest Navajo reservation in the country, established on tribal land held by the group since ancient times.
- The 62,000 Catholics in the Diocese of Gallup are served by 49 diocesan priests, 31 religious order and international priests, 29 permanent deacons, and more than 80 women religious. The women religious are from diverse congregations, including the Franciscans, Missionaries of Charity, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, and Little Sisters of the Poor. There are five seminarians preparing for the diocesan priesthood.
- Bishop James Wall, the fourth bishop of Gallup, grew up in the Diocese of Phoenix and was ordained a priest in 1998 and a bishop in 2009.
- Communication with parishes and schools is difficult because of the distance between them and the widespread lack of electronic equipment and Internet service. The diocese uses a combination of snail mail and weekly television broadcasts to get its message to the edges of its boundaries. It also has an active website, e-books, videos, a quarterly magazine, and a social media presence.



Strengthening the Church at Home

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CATHOLIC HOME MISSIONS

Office of National Collections

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

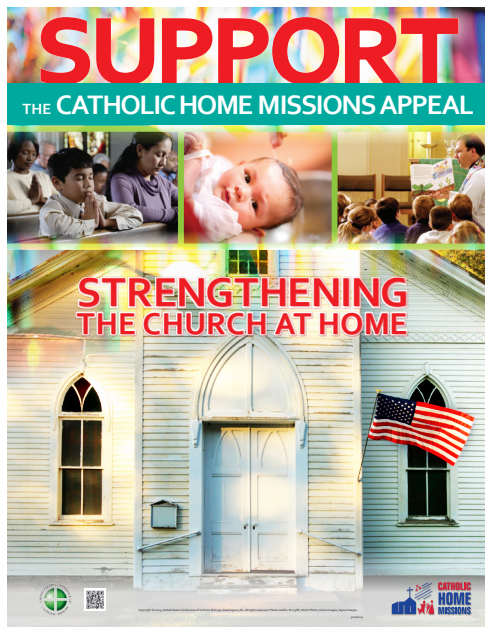
3211 Fourth Street NE

Washington, DC 20017-1194

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 61
Hyattsville, MD

WINTER 2014

IN THIS ISSUE



SUBCOMMITTEE ON CATHOLIC HOME MISSIONS

Chairman

Most Rev. Peter F. Christensen

Members

Most Rev. Stefan Soroka
Most Rev. Edward J. Burns
Most Rev. Robert E. Guglielmone
Most Rev. Curtis J. Guillory
Most Rev. Alberto Rojas
Most Rev. Paul D. Sirba
Most Rev. James S. Wall

Staff

Mary Mencarini Campbell, Director
Ken Q. Ong, Grants Specialist

THE DIOCESE OF GALLUP
is located in the arid Southwest and is one of the poorest dioceses in the country. In contrast to the stark desert landscape, the faith of the people is flourishing with an active lay ministry and an increase of vocations.



Your generosity to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal supports essential ministries in poor dioceses across the United States and its territories.

THANK YOU for being part of our efforts to strengthen the Church at home.

Copyright © 2014, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. All rights reserved. Photos: ©123RF; Diocese of Gallup.

