Refugees Find a Home for Faith

By Beth Griffin

When we think of worship in the vernacular, in the language of the people, we generally imagine English or Spanish or Tagalog or any of the familiar modern tongues brought to these shores by generations of Catholic immigrants. So it may come as a surprise to learn that one of the newest, most expansive, and fastest-growing dioceses in the country celebrates the liturgy in Aramaic, one of the world’s most ancient languages.

The language Jesus spoke is very much alive in the Chaldean Catholic Diocese of St. Peter the Apostle. The diocese was established in 2002 to serve a torrent of people fleeing violence and persecution in Iraq and Iran. Bishop Sarhad Jammo is its first leader.

There are currently ten parishes and six missions in California, Arizona, Nevada, and Texas, but the diocese covers the 19 westernmost states of the country. Catholic Home Missions (CHM) funds many of its programs.

St. Peter the Apostle is the second Chaldean Catholic eparchy or diocese in the United States after the Diocese of St. Thomas in Detroit. The Chaldean Catholic Church is one of several Eastern Catholic Churches that enjoy the same dignity, rights, and obligations as the Latin Church. Eastern Catholic Churches have distinctive liturgical and legal systems that reflect the national or ethnic character of their region of origin. Chaldeans are descendants of the ancient Babylonians and are the primary Christian group in Iraq.

According to Fr. Andrew Younan, rector of the St. Thomas diocesan seminary of Mar Abba the Great in San Diego, an early wave...
Dear Friends,

For the Eastern Catholic Church, an eparchy is most similar to a diocese and is also in full communion with Rome. The Chaldean Catholic Diocese of St. Peter the Apostle is an Eastern Church that is still relatively new, but growing quickly! Founded in 2002, this diocese now serves ten parishes and six missions in four different states.

In this issue, read about how Bishop Sarhad Jammo works to serve the members of his flock, many of whom are refugees fleeing the violence and persecution in Iran and Iraq, Fr. Andrew Younan also explains how the Church is continuing to foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life in order to minister to their many members. This diocese has found creative ways to use technology in order to reach out to its members all over the world.

Funds from a Catholic Home Missions grant have been used to help support formation for their seminarians and religious community as well as their media outreach, aiding this young diocese as it faces its many challenges.

Thanks to Catholics like you, who are willing to give each year, Catholic Home Missions is giving $9 million in grants to dioceses here in the United States that struggle to meet basic pastoral needs. We are able to help because you so generously support the Catholic Home Missions Appeal.

This collection will soon be taken up in most dioceses in the United States. Through your generosity, many dioceses will receive the support they need to continue their ministries and promote an encounter with Christ for their people. Thank you for joining me in supporting and promoting this collection.

I ask that God bless you and your families as you lead your lives in faith. Together, let us continue to strengthen the Church at home.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Peter F. Christensen
Diocese of Boise

The young diocese devotes much of its resources to serving the newcomers. It relies on Catholic Home Missions for critical help with communications, evangelization, seminary education, and formation of women religious.

In its short existence, St. Peter the Apostle has cast a wide net. From a base in southern California, Kaldu Television and two Kaldaya websites reach Chaldean Catholics in their homeland and the countries to which they have fled. Fr. Younan says the Internet outreach was started by Bishop Jammo shortly after the diocese was established.

“People are scattered, and many are far from their families. Through our websites, they can be connected to the whole Chaldean Church,” Fr. Younan says. “The websites give our community everywhere in the world comfort, guidance, spiritual food, and social togetherness.”

The television station broadcasts live celebrations of the Chaldean Mass and other liturgical prayers, as well as lectures, social community gatherings, and other events. The media center includes a modest publishing operation...continued from page 1
that enables the diocese to produce its own liturgical booklets and catechetical materials in Aramaic, English, and Arabic.

Six women religious of the Workers of the Vineyard congregation run the websites and the media center and have developed a catechetical series for Chaldean Catholic liturgy and practices.

“Liturgy is a big part of how we come to understand Christ,” Fr. Younan says. “We incorporate liturgical texts into catechetical books. Our liturgy is a jewel.”

CHM funds help support the sisters and enable hundreds of children to participate in Catechism and First Holy Communion preparation classes.

The 16 priests of the diocese wear multiple hats, and their efforts are spread thin, but reinforcements are on the way. Ten deacons were ordained last year, and Fr. Younan says there are ten men in the seminary. “Proportionally, it’s a great blessing, but an expensive one,” he laughs.

He says the students are mostly American-born Californians. All have some knowledge of Aramaic, the primary language of the liturgy, some are more fluent than others, and about half speak it at home. Classes are taught in English and Aramaic.

Fr. Younan, the seminary rector, says there must be a secret to the robust vocations, “but I don’t know it! We try to be as faithful and dedicated to Christ as we can, and they come. Young men and women see us work to the bone, and it’s magnetic,” he says. “We praise God and thank God for it—and he takes care of it.”

“God has worked through Catholic Home Missions,” Fr. Younan says. “Nothing we do is luxurious. We are following the command of Christ to preach the Gospel and provide workers for the vineyard. CHM is one of the ways God has allowed us to continue to do his work.”

CHM funds help support seminarians, who take part of their training at John Paul the Great Catholic University in Escondido, California.

Reflecting on the challenge of financing a new and rapidly growing diocese, Bishop Jammo says, “This diocese, having received most of its faithful as immigrants and refugees, could not immediately provide for diocesan needs. That is why the support of Catholic Home Missions at this critical period was important for establishing the fundamentally needed institutions in the diocese.”

He concludes, “The grant money has been pivotal for the major diocesan projects. As a new diocese, we needed this additional brotherly support to build the basic new institutions so that our community will be acquainted with them and grow up in supporting them.”
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.

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IN THIS ISSUE

READ ABOUT THE RAPIDLY growing Chaldean Catholic Diocese of St. Peter the Apostle, an Eastern Church working to create a home of faith for refugees.

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