By Beth Griffin

“We do a lot with what we have because we believe in what we do.” This proud assertion by Kim Richard, development director for the Diocese of Amarillo, Texas, could be the motto for Catholics in north Texas.

By any definition, the Church in Amarillo is stretched. Geographically, it spools out over 26,000 square miles in 26 counties. The 36 active diocesan, religious, and extern priests wear multiple hats. There are 49 parishes and missions, most of which share a pastor. While there are 13,000 registered parishioners, more than 50,000 Catholics regularly attend Mass and parish events. In much of the diocese, 50% of the people live at or below the federal poverty line. The median annual income in the diocese is $30,000, significantly less than the statewide average of $39,000.

But participation by the laity is extraordinary. In the absence of any paid staff in most parishes, lay people volunteer as secretaries and custodians and travel to the diocesan headquarters in Amarillo to train as directors of religious education, youth ministers, and catechists.

“They work tirelessly, and they do it because they believe in our faith and want their children to grow up with it,” Kim says. “We may be poor in some ways, but we are so rich in faith that it overcomes our difficulties.”

Catholic Home Missions provides annual grant funds to sustain the Diocese of Amarillo.

Amarillo is in the Texas panhandle, which features mile upon mile of arid, flat, open land, surrounded on three sides by New Mexico and Oklahoma. Bridges cross dry river beds. Bent mature trees and humming windmills testify to the strength of the persistent wind.

Cattle is still king in the region, which includes the town of Hereford, the self-proclaimed “Beef Capital of the World.” The major employers in the area are feedlots, dairies, farms, meat processing plants, and cotton gins. The feedlots are huge operations and give off a pungent odor during rare rains. The locals call it “the scent of money,” Kim says.

Priests from the diocese offer Mass at some of the dairy farms, Kim says, to accommodate the workers who would otherwise be unable to attend Sunday Mass.

Amarillo is an ethnically diverse place, where 43 languages are spoken and refugees from...
across the globe are resettled with go
government and private assistance. In the
dioce, Mass is celebrated in English, Span
Spanish, Vietnamese, and Dinka, a lan
language of South Sudan.

The Hispanic Catholic community is
well established and continues to grow,
but many parishioners are not formally
registered with parishes, because either
they are undocumented or they are not
acclimated to making a formal affiliation
with their parish.

“The newcomers are a challenge for
the religious and civic communities
but also a great opportunity for us.
We experience the universality of the
Church and recognize the beauty of
other cultures. We can also witness our
cultural continuity to the civic community
and partner with them to help make
the resettlement smooth,” Amarillo Bishop
Patrick J. Zurek says.

Many parishes hold religious and
cultural festivals that celebrate the
heritage of established groups as well
as new immigrants and help raise funds
for parish programs. People from across
the diocese gather to share the fun and
provide support.

“That’s an attitudinal change for
us,” Kim says. “We’ve really come
together as one Church, one diocese,
and not as a collection of separate
parishes. People want to help other
parishes succeed.”

They do so by attending one anoth
er’s festivals, each of which showcases
traditional food and music. Kim
describes La Jamaica Mexican carnivals,
Our Lady of Guadalupe events

That draw in the entire community, and
German fests that feature myriad sau
sage varieties. Another popular fund-
raise is an after-Mass tamale sale. The
Catholic Student Center at West Texas
A&M University uses a silent auction
with works by popular local artists to
generate funds and crowds.

One parish also offers English classes
and helps with acculturation, teaching
practical skills as diverse as sewing,
cooking, and using the telephone.

Kim says the faith of the people is
embedded and passed from generation
to generation within both established
and immigrant communities. It is also
expressed in many different ways, and
the Church has a responsibility to
help people understand and grow in
their faith.

“People are unaware of the services
we offer,” Kim says. For example, the
Respect Life and Family ministries
have programs to help people who feel
they are not worthy to participate in
the life of the Church because they
are in an irregular marriage, Kim says.
“We help them get back in the good
graces of the Church,” she continues.

Amarillo uses Catholic Home
Missions funds to help its vocation
efforts. One priest was ordained in
2015, and there are four men studying
in three seminaries in Houston, San
Antonio, and Conception, Missouri.

The diocesan vocations director is
also the rector of the cathedral and
responsible for a flourishing elementary
school. He hosts retreats, Theology on
Tap events, and quarterly “Pizza with a
Priest” evenings, among other outreach
efforts, but is hampered by the small
number of colleges, which are tradi
tional recruiting grounds for vocations.
There are several community colleges,
only one secular university, and no
Catholic colleges.

Faith formation and youth ministry
are diocesan priorities that Catholic
Home Missions funds. Catechetical
leaders from each parish attend dean
ery and diocesan workshops in spiri
tuality, sacramental preparation, and

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear Friends,

It’s incredible what people
can do when they work
together in community. The
Diocese of Amarillo is just
one example of the great
work that can be done when a community
unites. This diocese struggles with a low
number of priests—most parishes share a
priest—and a high rate of poverty. Despite
these challenges, lay participation keeps
many parishes and ministries running.

In this issue, Kim Richard, the develop
ment director for the diocese, shares about
the passion and faith of the people in the
diocese. Many come from different cultures
and backgrounds but support each other in
their faith journeys. It is inspiring to hear
about all the diocese is able to accomplish,
with the support of its people, despite the
lack of resources.

Grants from Catholic Home Missions have
helped provide support to programs in the
Diocese of Amarillo as diverse as discern
ment retreats, prison ministry, youth minis
try, and training of faith formation cate
chists. These programs rely on the support
received from Catholic Home Missions.

Like Amarillo, so many of the dioceses
across the United States struggle to meet
their basic pastoral needs. Even when faced
with these challenges, home mission dio
ceses continue to minister to their brethren
through a variety of greatly needed pastoral
programs and ministries. It is thanks to the
generosity of people like you that these
dioceses are able to continue providing important resources for their flocks. Your steadfast prayers and contributions make
their ministries possible.

With your continued help and generosity,
Catholic Home Missions can continue to
support needy dioceses. Let us join together
as one community to support one another
in our faith. Be assured of my prayers of
graditude for you and all you do.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Peter F. Christensen
Diocese of Boise

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Bishop Patrick Zurek celebrates the Year of Faith with the Burmese community.
faith at home. Because of the rapidly growing Hispanic population, faith formation and education materials are offered in Spanish and English.

The youth ministry program teaches and empowers the youth to use and share their gifts for active service and participation in the life of the Catholic faith community. The ministry develops leadership and offers retreats and rallies.

The first Mass in the diocese was celebrated by Spanish explorers in 1541. Three years later, Fr. Juan de Padilla, the Spanish Franciscan who offered the Ascension Day Mass, was killed while evangelizing in present-day Kansas. He was the first martyr on US soil.

Amarillo was under the canonical jurisdiction of dioceses in Mexico, Louisiana, Galveston, and Dallas before it was established as a diocese in 1926. The Diocese of Lubbock was created from Amarillo in 1983.

German, Irish, and Polish immigrants built many of the first churches in the diocese, Kim says.

Bishop Zurek became the eighth bishop of Amarillo in 2008. “We are a poor missionary diocese,” he says. “However, the poor have the same hopes, dreams, and desires for the faith development of themselves and their children as those who are not.”

“Catholic Home Missions assistance truly helps us to fulfill these hopes, dreams, and desires. As Pope Francis would say, it is so beautiful to see brothers and sisters of the Catholic faith accompanying us and providing for our needs. I am truly grateful for your accompaniment of our people and of your generous assistance,” Bishop Zurek says.

Contrasting Amarillo to the prosperous Midwestern diocese of her youth, Kim says, “It’s humbling. My faith has totally been enriched. I look at what we have here and see churches packed with smiling people who have pride in their parishes and love to welcome visitors.

“It’s amazing to see how much can be done with so little money—and then dream of how much more we could do if we had the resources!”

• Catholics in the Diocese of Amarillo make up about 11% of the population of 427,000. They are concentrated in the city of Amarillo.

• The diocese covers 26,000 square miles in 26 counties.

• There are 49 parishes with an average of 150 families each. Most parishes share a pastor. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Turkey, Texas, is typical: The median annual income in the community is $25,000. The parish has 25 families. The pastor serves three parishes.

• Amarillo is served by 22 active diocesan priests, four Franciscan friars, and 10 priests from other dioceses or countries. In addition, there are 38 active deacons and 86 women religious. Many of the women belong to the Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, a Franciscan religious community founded and headquartered in the diocese.

• In the diocese, there are four Catholic elementary schools and one secondary school.

• The nearest Catholic college is in Shawnee, Oklahoma, approximately 250 miles from Amarillo.

• Diocesan prison ministry volunteers serve Catholics in seven facilities. One inmate told the volunteers, “Without our faith, prison would be nothing but a bloodbath.”

• St. Laurence is the patron saint of the Diocese of Amarillo.
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.