

# neighbors

FALL 2011

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

## FINDING UNITY IN THE DIVIDE

BY BETH GRIFFIN

**A** VISITOR TO SOUTHERN COLORADO LOOKING AT A MAP OF THE DIOCESE OF PUEBLO MIGHT BE FORGIVEN FOR WONDERING WHY IT TAKES EVERYONE SO LONG TO GET AROUND BY CAR. BUT THERE, IN THE FINE PRINT, IS THE ANSWER: THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS BISECT THE DIOCESE, SO EAST-WEST TRIPS INVOLVE BRAVING HIGH ALTITUDES AND MOUNTAIN PASSES AND CROSSING THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE. MOST OTHER TRAVEL BETWEEN PARISHES REQUIRES LONG DRIVES THROUGH SPARSELY POPULATED TERRITORY.

WHILE THE GEOGRAPHY IS A CHALLENGE TO ministry in Pueblo, Catholicism is deeply rooted there and is nourished by clergy and laity dedicated to using contemporary tools for evangelization and faith formation.

Catholic Home Missions (CHM) supports the Diocese of Pueblo with grants for seminary education, formation of deacons and lay ministers, prison ministry, communications, religious education, and campus ministry. More recently, the diocese also applied for funding for its Respect Life training.

The population of the largely rural diocese includes Hispanics whose ancestors settled the area hundreds of years ago; Eastern Europeans, Irish, and Italians drawn to the steel industry in the late 19th and 20th centuries; and more recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America.

"One of the great things about our diocese is the diversity," says Deacon Jake Arellano, director of vocations. "We have

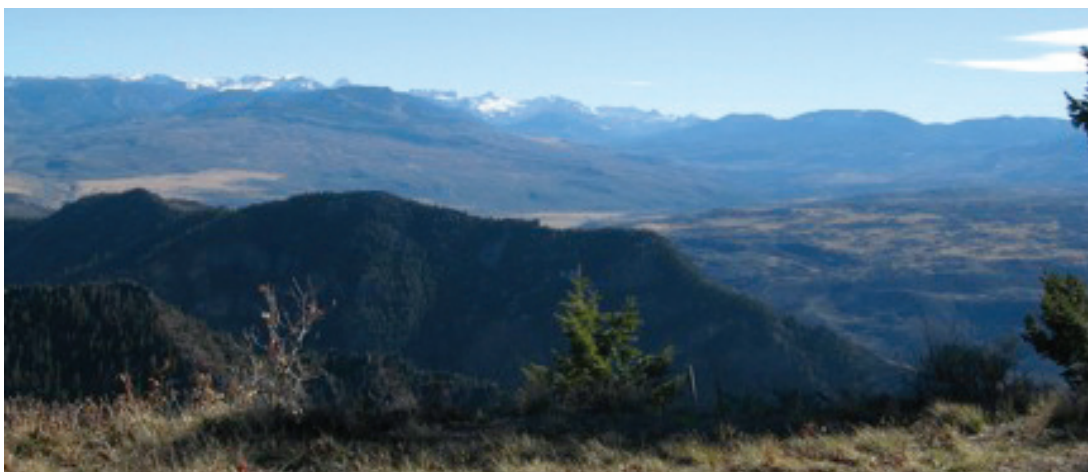
plains, mountains, and grand mesa, and we have so many cultures and their different expressions of faith." Catholics represent 18% of the population and are served by 48 priests and 45 deacons. Two priests were ordained for the diocese in the past year.

The diocese does not have its own seminary, and Deacon Arellano says Pueblo now has six seminarians preparing for the priesthood in four different cities in the United States and Mexico. "It's difficult, because I can't just go up the road to see our seminarians, but I try to visit each seminary once a year, and I see the men when they come home to visit."

This year, for the first time, Deacon Arellano organized a thousand-mile diocesan "pilgrimage" for seminarians. They traveled throughout the diocese, staying in parish halls and meeting the people they will serve.

"We're a poor diocese, and we have a lot of people living well below the national median income," Deacon Arellano says. "But

we have a lot of people who draw their strength from a tremendous faith, even in adversity, and that's inspiring. Our people are warm and welcoming. They're great and they work with what they have."



The western slope of the Rocky Mountains, which divide the Diocese of Pueblo.

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## FROM THE CHAIRMAN



DEAR FRIENDS,

**W**ithin the largely agricultural setting of Colorado, the 49,000-square-mile Diocese of Pueblo serves 75,000

Catholics in 53 parishes and 44 missions throughout 29 counties. In some places, parishes are as much as 40 miles apart. Approximately 18% of the population is Catholic. With 48 active diocesan priests, this poor mission diocese relies heavily on its 45 deacons and countless dedicated lay leaders to maintain a Catholic presence in every county in southern Colorado.

For all practical purposes, there are “two dioceses” divided by the massive 14,000-foot-high Rocky Mountains that pierce the Colorado sky. Designating the line at which waters flow either to the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans, the Continental Divide reflects the diocese’s constant challenge to serve Catholics on both the eastern and western slopes of the mountains. Maintaining a healthy unity among all its parishes and missions is no easy task.

The Diocese of Pueblo is truly a diocese on a mission. Catholic Home Missions helps the people of this important region, facing great needs and great challenges, continue their good works.

Most Rev. Michael W. Warfel  
Bishop of Great Falls-Billings  
Chairman, USCCB Subcommittee  
on Catholic Home Missions



A family participates in the Life Chain, a twice-yearly event held throughout the diocese.

### THE DIACONATE WAS STARTED IN 1996 AND HAS

attracted men of varying ages and backgrounds, according to Deacon Arellano. “Deacon formation is a challenge when people have to come from a distance and is hard to do online, because the human dimension is key,” he says. The diocese is taking a year to revamp its four-year deacon training program and is considering increasing the online component and adding an additional year of study.

At 39 years old, Darrell Pagels is Pueblo’s youngest deacon. He and his wife, Tammy, are the parents of five children ranging from an infant to a pre-teen. They are also the volunteer co-directors of the nascent diocesan Respect Life Office. Their experience and enthusiasm far outweigh their modest diocesan budget.

Since they started the office in 2010, the Pagels have begun a teen chastity program and organized biannual prayer Life Chains, and they will inaugurate Project Rachel later this year. “We talk about our journey, and it makes a big impact on people,” Deacon Pagels says.

The Pagels lost two sons to miscarriage, delivering them at three months’ and six months’ gestation. The powerful experiences of a forced abortion and witnessing prenatal development inspired them to ask Bishop Fernando Isern of Pueblo for permission to bring Project Rachel to the diocese. It is a program for healing after abortion, miscarriage, or stillbirth.

Deacon Pagel says the teen chastity program is strong and growing, “but the geography makes a big impact. Everything is so widespread here. My wife and I drove six and a half hours to speak at a pro-life event in Grand Junction, but it’s hard to get teens to come to Pueblo, so we want to take the programs to them.”

Deacon Pagels balances his respect for life work with family responsibilities and a full-time job in the food processing industry. “It’s a challenge and it gets frustrating for my wife and me, but we’re passionate about what

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Msgr. Howard Delaney, who turns 100 in December, is officially retired, but he is a visible presence at Christ the King Parish.

we do, and we can bring our children with us. I love the Church, and I love what I do,” he says.

Prison ministry in Pueblo is literally a boom industry. There are 22 prisons within the diocese, including 16 state, four federal, and two privately operated prisons. Most counties also have their own jails. Deacon Marco Vegas, director for institutional ministries, says 12 priests, deacons, and lay volunteers navigate long-standing bureaucratic biases and a complex system of regulations to bring the sacraments to the Catholic prisoners.

“I understand the fear of going into a setting where you hear the clang of the door shutting behind you, but you get beyond it,” he says. “The high point is knowing that you have the ability to change someone’s outlook, that you’ve made a big difference in someone’s life, or helped them see that Christ loves them, or just being present for them.”

Inmates in “administrative segregation” in the federal prisons are locked up for 23 hours a day and are not allowed to gather in groups. Chaplain visits there are rare, but Deacon Vegas



Fr. Michael Chrisman’s hands are anointed during his ordination at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Pueblo.

says Bishop Isern is allowed to administer Reconciliation and the Eucharist cell to cell each year.

“The great distances of the diocese and the economic stagnation in many areas leave us deeply grateful for the support of Catholic Home Missions,” says Bishop Fernando Isern, now in his second year as bishop of Pueblo. “The generosity of CHM allows us to nurture a vibrant Catholic faith through ministries that would not be funded without its help.”

Looking to the future, Fr. Michael Papesh, vicar for administration, says, “If the initiatives we are currently beginning take hold, the sinews of communion, built by diocesan leadership participation, coupled with electronic communication and online formation, will create considerable vibrancy and enthusiasm and a vigorous education/formation process across the parishes.” ■

## DID YOU KNOW?

- The Spanish brought Catholicism to the Pueblo area in 1598.
- The Diocese of Pueblo serves approximately 75,000 Catholics in 53 parishes and 44 missions distributed over 48,000 square miles.
- There are 48 diocesan, international, and religious priests and 45 deacons in the diocese, which is also home to 55 women religious from 15 congregations and two men religious.
- The diocesan chancery in Pueblo has 13 pastoral staff and 13 administrative staff.
- Most of the diocese is rural, and 80% of the population lives in towns with fewer than 2,500 people.
- There are four cities—Pueblo, Grand Junction, Durango, and Alamosa—with a combined population of less than 300,000.
- Five of the 29 counties in the diocese fit the 19th-century definition of *frontier*, with less than three persons per square mile.
- Ranching, agriculture, and prisons are the predominant industries.
- The median income in the diocese is \$24,000 a year, but in some communities, it is \$15,000.
- There are three diocese-affiliated Catholic elementary schools and no Catholic high schools or colleges in the diocese.
- The diocese supports Catholic campus ministry at four secular colleges and one university.
- The *Today’s Catholic* monthly diocesan newspaper reaches 27,000 households.
- Most of Colorado’s prisons are located in the Diocese of Pueblo.



# neighbors

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Fall 2011

## In this issue . . .

**H**ome mission dioceses face many unique challenges that make it difficult to provide for the faithful in the region. Read about the Diocese of Pueblo and the many ways it is working to overcome the challenge of rugged terrain separating the diocese while enriching the lives of those it serves.

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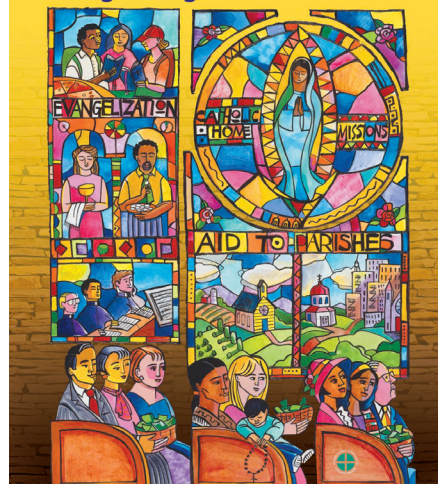
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