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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CATHOLIC HOME MISSIONS APPEAL: SHARING ONE FAITH IN AMERICA**

WASHINGTON—The national *Catholic Home Missions Appeal* will take place in parishes across the country the weekend of April 25-26. It provides a unique opportunity for Americans to assist struggling Catholic communities in the United States.

Missions are not only located overseas. The Archdiocese of Anchorage, Alaska, has 11,500 registered Catholic families dispersed throughout 140,000 square miles and only 30 active diocesan priests to minister to them. Of the 29 counties in the geographically sprawling Diocese of Salt Lake City, only 16 have a resident pastor. These are only two examples of the 95 dioceses in the United States—including the Eastern Catholic eparchies—that receive funding from the *Catholic Home Missions Appeal* every year to assist with the basic needs of the Church.

Bishop Michael W. Warfel of Great Falls-Billings, Montana, and Chairman of the Subcommittee on Catholic Home Missions, highlighted the effect of the current economy on home mission parishes.

“Today's economy is affecting all of us. From Wall Street to Main Street, there are layoffs, foreclosures, bankruptcies, and bailouts. As America tightens its wallet, it is important to remember the home mission dioceses, that could barely keep parishes running before the economic crisis, now struggle even more, with less funding and fewer staff.,” Bishop Warfel said.

Although they are located all over the U.S. map, most of these dioceses reside in the Deep South, Appalachia, the Southwest, the Rocky Mountains, Alaska, and U.S. island territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific.

Home mission dioceses in the United States are characterized by a lack of resources to provide basic pastoral services for the faithful. Home mission parishes often struggle with priest shortages, parishioner poverty, unemployment, difficult or isolated terrain, religious hostility and

other practices that impact the practice of the faith. Many also are struggling to meet the challenges of culturally diverse communities.

The Diocese of El Paso houses one of the three poorest urban counties in all of the United States. More than 30 percent of its population lives in poverty. The diocese also houses two dedicated sisters who form the West Texas Evangelization and Youth Ministry Program of the diocese. Sister Marge and Sister Luz minister to 5 parishes and 17 missions that require them to travel across 26,000 miles of vast and unforgiving desert terrain. The Catholic Home Missions Appeal funds 100 percent of the sisters' operating budget.

The current economic climate in the United States is making it even more difficult for the Home Missions dioceses to stay afloat through budget and staff cuts.

Judith A. Phillips, of the Development Office in the Diocese of Belleville, Illinois, summed it up this way, "As I'm sure you've heard from so many mission dioceses, it has been a very difficult year. For us here, we have faced not only the economy but other issues unique to our diocese... We are in the midst of the 'perfect storm'. For many reasons, Catholic Home Missions' support in the coming year truly means a great deal to us."

More information on the *Catholic Home Missions Appeal* can be found at <http://www.usccb.org/hm/>.

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