



**CATHOLIC  
HOME  
MISSIONS**

## Amarillo: A Community of Hope



Youth perform a traditional dance at the Our Lady of Guadalupe Celebration.

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

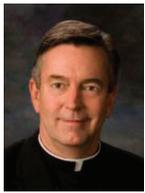
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# Neighbors

SUMMER 2015

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

# 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 pastor—and a high rate of poverty. Despite these challenges, lay participation keeps many parishes and ministries running.

In this issue, Kim Richard, the development 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 discernment retreats, prison ministry, youth ministry, and training of faith formation catechists. 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 dioceses 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 gratitude for you and all you do.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Peter F. Christensen  
Diocese of Boise

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across the globe are resettled with government and private assistance. In the diocese, Mass is celebrated in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Dinka, a 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 accustomed 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 concern 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 another's festivals, each of which showcases traditional food and music. Kim describes La Jamaica Mexican carnivals, Our Lady of Guadalupe events



Bishop Patrick Zurek celebrates the Year of Faith with the Burmese community.

that draw in the entire community, and German feasts that feature myriad sausage varieties. Another popular fundraiser 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 traditional 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 deanery and diocesan workshops in spirituality, sacramental preparation, and

# DID YOU KNOW?



Children perform a traditional Vietnamese dance at the Our Lady of Guadalupe celebration.



Mariachi youth perform a traditional dance at the Year of Faith celebration.

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.



Bishop Patrick Zurek joins the Sudanese community at the Our Lady of Guadalupe celebration.



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**SUMMER 2015**

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READ ABOUT THE DIVERSE communities in the Diocese of Amarillo working to help make hope blossom in the arid Texas landscape.



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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