



**CATHOLIC
HOME
MISSIONS**

Diocese of Steubenville



Barnesville, OH laity
in action.

By Beth Griffin

“As poor and as sparsely Catholic as it is as a diocese, the people are the salt of the earth and have a deep, active faith. The ground is extremely fertile, and the Catholic Church is going to be instrumental in the revitalization of the area,” says Sister Mary Brigid Callan, PhD.

She is the optimistic director of stewardship and development for the long, narrow Diocese of Steubenville, Ohio, which hugs the Ohio River for more than 300 miles, abutting West Virginia and Kentucky. Catholic Home Missions (CHM) provides grant support to the diocese.

The Diocese of Steubenville serves portions of both Appalachia and the Rust Belt, places almost synonymous with poverty, unemployment, and drug addiction. The once-dominant steel industry is a distant memory. Catholics

represent a tiny fraction of the population, on average only 6.2% of approximately 500,000 people.

Yet there is ample reason to sustain hope.

Vocations is one area where strong faith and CHM funding overlap to make a significant impact in the diocese, which has nine men studying for the priesthood. Most of them grew up in Ohio.

“Vocations are always on everyone’s mind,” Sr. Mary Brigid says. Many people are praying, and perpetual adoration is popular and effective, she explains. In addition, Steubenville’s Bishop Jeffrey Monforton, installed in 2012, visits parishes regularly and participates in an annual vocations tour. This tour travels to nine parish and school locations with a team that includes the vocations director and other clergy and religious.

“It’s an informal evening of questions and answers, vocation stories and prayer,” Sr. Mary Brigid says. “And it’s a huge blessing to have Catholic Home Missions funding so we can generate beautiful materials, get out on the road, and have a traveling exhibit.”

Seminary education is always a challenge for mission dioceses. As Sr. Mary Brigid says, “You never want a young man to walk away from a calling because of money.”

Fr. Michael Gossett, ordained in 2011, is the part-time vocations director for the diocese. Like many others, he wears several hats, including chaplain of a high school and parochial vicar of a parish.

Because he can only devote a portion of his week to vocations, Fr. Michael relies on other priests of the diocese to point candidates in

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Neighbors

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A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The parable of the mustard seed shows us that the Kingdom of Heaven is like “the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants” (Mt 13:32). God multiplies

what we offer and makes it abundant.

In this issue, we see this growth into abundance in the Diocese of Steubenville, which is finding innovative ways to meet the challenges of a small Catholic population, economic hardship, and a small number of clergy and religious—with help from Catholic Home Missions (CHM) grant funding. Using an “all-hands” approach in which laity, clergy, and religious work together to foster vocations, minister to high school students, and prepare couples for healthy, lasting marriages, this mission diocese embodies the hope and optimism of the faith-filled sower planting the mustard seed.

Your support of Catholic Home Missions makes possible initiatives such as a vocations tour of parishes and schools throughout the Diocese of Steubenville. On these tours, students meet clergy and religious in a friendly, informal setting and have their questions answered, hear vocations stories, and pray with each other and with the diocesan vocations team. The diocese is also able to support marriage and family life education with CHM funding the production of video presentations on Natural Family Planning and Saint John Paul II’s Theology of the Body for couples who are preparing for marriage.

By supporting home mission dioceses through the Catholic Home Missions Appeal, your generosity helps others grow in faith and holiness in their schools, parishes, seminaries, and marriages. Thank you for your prayers and support.

In the Heart of Christ,

Most Reverend Paul D. Etienne, DD, STL
Archbishop of Anchorage

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Bishop Monforton with families at dedication of new Our Lady of Mercy Church, Carrollton, OH.

his direction. He says, “God provides. He keeps calling men to the priesthood.”

Fr. Michael found himself in a unique position as the vocation director for his own brother, a seminarian for the diocese. He recalls, “At the ordination in 2016, when the bishop asked if my brother was worthy, I got to answer, ‘Yes!’”

Fr. Michael’s enthusiasm is palpable. He

describes the priesthood as an opportunity to show the mercy of God (in the Sacrament of Reconciliation), be a sign of hope, and be an example of God’s love to others. “You are walking with somebody and staying with them throughout a big, important part of their life,” he explains. “You’re a father to them and not just exercising a job. You are showing Christ to them, and they are showing Christ to you, too.”

High school ministry is “not easy all the time, but it’s important,” he says. “As long as you show up, and are authentic and patient, God does amazing things.” At the school where he is the chaplain, Fr. Michael always has students waiting when he hears confession twice a week. He also conducts monthly Eucharistic adoration and well-attended praise workshops. “I’m looking forward to running out of space in the room where they’re held,” he says.

Fr. Michael is encouraged by the seminarians and young people he encounters. “Their problems are probably harder than ours, yet they keep showing up and they want to know God. No matter what mistakes church leaders have made, the faith is still there.”

Among the myriad challenges of a diocese serving the Rust Belt, Fr. Michael recognizes an opportunity to return to the original mission of the Church—evangelization. “People are great and they want to practice their faith. Whatever we can do to sustain that is exciting to me,” he says.

Many Catholics associate Steubenville with Franciscan University, a private Catholic school operated by the Franciscan Friars of the Third Order Regular. Although Franciscan University has no formal connection with the diocese, Sr. Mary Brigid says there is still much interaction. Bishop Monforton and members of the diocesan staff teach courses at the university. Also, the diocese enjoys access to the university’s Catechetical Institute, a program that combines online learning and personal mentoring to form catechists and other pastoral

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ministers, particularly in dioceses with small staffs.

The Diocese of Steubenville relies on lay people and permanent deacons for many of its ministries, Sr. Mary Brigid says. “It’s a

wonderful knitting together of clergy and lay people out of common necessity,” she describes.

The diocese has 16 permanent deacons, and the diaconate formation program is now run by two deacons from the diocese, whereas it was outsourced in the past. “It has bloomed because it comes from the grassroots,” Sr. Mary Brigid explains. “They’re not doing anything new, but are doing it from the depths of their soul.”

Lay people have an enthusiastic advocate in Joseph (Joe) Schmidt, new director of the Office of Marriage, Family and Respect Life. Following the diocesan pattern, Joe also serves as the part-time director of religious education at a parish in Marietta, Ohio.

Joe brings to his job the valuable perspectives of a seminary education, a master’s degree thesis on Saint John Paul II’s writings on marriage and family, his work as a Catholic school teacher and parish youth minister, and a 15-year marriage. His wife homeschools their four children. “My best ideas come from them,” Joe acknowledges.

He credits his seminary experience with preparing him for marriage by presenting the Church as a global family. “I came from a difficult home that was not a healthy environment. I needed to relearn things,” he explains. “The seminary formed me to be a Catholic man according to the



Reconsecration of the diocese to the Immaculate Heart of Mary at the Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption, Marietta, OH.

Church’s beautiful vision.”

The Diocese of Steubenville adopted a new marriage preparation policy that Joe helped to develop. It includes a complete course in Natural Family Planning and a substantial introduction to Saint John Paul II’s Theology of the Body. Using CHM funds, the diocese commissioned videos by Dr. Greg and Lisa Popcak, noted Catholic marriage and family counselors.

Because parishes are spread out, the diocese relies on electronic methods to share information and conduct programs. Joe says the Popcak videos give parishes flexibility to adapt instruction to local needs.

Joe also organizes an annual diocesan gathering of parish Natural Family Planning instructors and anticipates holding a first-ever conference on the Theology of the Body. “I love to bring people together to share insights and support one another,” Joe says.

Bishop Monforton says that CHM funding enables the diocese “to prepare future shepherds and afford our youth and young adults the faith tools essential for missionary discipleship to a world in desperate need to encounter Jesus Christ.”

“Catholic Home Missions gives us the opportunity to educate our brothers and sisters on the dignity of all human life and the sacred nature of marriage. It helps us keep the faith burning for all to see,” he concludes. 🌿

DID YOU KNOW?

- The Diocese of Steubenville covers 5,913 square miles in 13 largely rural counties in Appalachian Ohio. Three of the counties have only one Catholic parish serving the entire county.
- The region’s 500,000 people include approximately 31,000 Catholics. In some of the diocese’s counties, Catholics make up only 1% of the population.
- The biweekly diocesan newspaper, the *Steubenville Register*, is the primary means of communication.
- The Diocese of Steubenville was founded in 1944 as a mission diocese formed from the Diocese of Columbus.
- It has 54 parishes and 3 missions. The people are served by 42 active diocesan priests, 27 active religious and extern priests, 16 permanent deacons, and women and men religious from more than 20 communities.
- The diocese currently has nine seminarians, including two young men from the same family.



Fr. Michael Gossett leading adoration at CHM-funded Diocesan Youth Conference.



Strengthening the Church at Home

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READ ABOUT HOW clergy and laity in the Diocese of Steubenville work together to strengthen marriages and vocations.



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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