



**CATHOLIC
HOME
MISSIONS**

Yearning for Christ in the High Desert



Powell Butte Retreat Center in central Oregon provides retreats and camps amid the beauty and quiet of nature.

By Beth Griffin

“We are a mission diocese in the truest sense. We embody what the New Evangelization is about: a personal transformation through conversion to Christ, participation in sacramental worship and catechetical experiences that deepen the integration of faith into all areas of life,” Barry Metzentine says. He is director of evangelization and catechesis for the Diocese of Baker, which covers a huge, largely rural expanse in Central and Eastern Oregon.

“Here in one of the most secularized states in the country, there is a real yearning. We’re feeding souls who haven’t had the advantages of the plethora of resources available in larger dioceses,” he adds.

The Diocese of Baker covers the eastern two-thirds of Oregon and has 40,000 registered parishioners who worship at 36 parishes and 23 missions. Many parishes are separated from their closest neighbors by 50 miles or more. Bishop Liam Cary, who has led the diocese since 2012, logs more than 35,000 miles on his car each year making pastoral visits to people in the towns that dot the sunny, high-desert landscape.

“The Church is iconic in these small towns,” says Hope Burke, chief financial officer of the diocese. “There may not be a lot of Catholics there, but they are the heart and soul of the community. They are salt-of-the-earth people who, when something needs to be done, show up and do it.”

Hope says the diocese focuses on helping close-knit rural Catholic communities maintain a sense of connection to the larger diocesan and universal church, despite the great distances.

Catholic Home Missions provides an annual grant to the Diocese of Baker. The funds are used to support religious education, Catholic schools, Hispanic ministry, youth camps and retreats, and small parishes.



Attendee discussing the Hispanic Track presentation at the Evangelization and Catechesis Symposium.

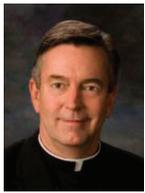
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Neighbors

FALL 2015

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear Friends,

There is small parish in the Diocese of Baker, where years ago the pastor began to pray the Stations of the Cross throughout his town. Parishioners would process throughout the town to 14 locations like libraries, hospitals, and schools, praying at each location for those who are associated with it—the emergency workers, teachers, law enforcement. This event brought much energy to the community and impacted not only the parishioners but the community as whole.

This parish, like so many others throughout our country, relies on the generosity of people like you through Catholic Home Missions. As you will see in this issue, despite the many challenges it faces as a mission diocese, the Diocese of Baker has many communities with a vibrant faith seeking a deeper relationship with Christ. From providing catechetical resources to parishes, to forging relationships with the University of Portland, the Diocese of Baker works to create a sense of unity of community among its members.

So often home mission territory does not have the resources to provide the programs and outreach for the faithful that live there. But thanks to your support, Catholic Home Missions can provide necessary grants to mission territory, like the Diocese of Baker, to bolster their programs.

Over the past six years as a member of the Catholic Home Missions Committee, I have learned so much about our mission dioceses. The work of those who have little resources to serve the needs of their communities has been inspiring. The story of Baker is just one of many. This November ends my tenure as Chairman for the Subcommittee on Catholic Home Missions. My role as chairman has been an enriching experience, and I thank you for your support and prayers. Your generosity has given me much inspiration and hope and I am truly grateful for all you do to support Catholic Home Missions and strengthen the Church at home. May God continue to bless you abundantly.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Peter F. Christensen
Diocese of Boise

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Bishop Cary says, “The generous assistance of Catholic Home Missions is invaluable to us here in the Diocese of Baker. I wouldn’t want to think what we would do without it.”

The diocese covers 18 counties whose economies were developed by cattle and sheep ranching, agriculture, and farming. Jobs have been lost in recent



Sister Sabina joining Bishop Cary at Family Camp.

years due to the closure of timber mills and the decline in the number of family ranches.

BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS

“There’s a willingness and a can-do attitude in the parishes. People want to do the Lord’s work, and they want to do it well,” Hope says. “We help them by instilling confidence in their abilities and giving them the resources to do it. We’re building strong foundations in the parishes by educating and equipping people on the front lines to feel stronger in their faith so they can go out and serve,” she says.

Barry says diocesan evangelization and catechesis have been invigorated by an ambitious new five-year strategic road map that aims to bring consistent catechetical training to parishes and families. “We’ve entered a new paradigm of growth; it’s not just maintenance and survival,” he says.

One of the first efforts introduced catechetical certification across the diocese. “We lacked solid catechetical experience here, which was not the fault of the people; it just was not the foundational basis of the program,” he explains.

Parish directors of religious education, youth ministers, and volunteer catechists attend an annual evangelization and catechesis symposium. In addition, the diocesan staff runs workshops in each deanery to train and equip attendees to lead other staff and volunteers.

“There’s a wave of initiatives, with constant follow-up, so we introduce something, offer training and then implement it,” Barry says. “Last year, it was catechetical certification and new sacramental preparation guidelines; this year, it’s RCIA guidelines and new youth ministry material.”

The family is central to these efforts, he says, and the diocese is drawing parents into their role as the first teachers of their children. “We engage and catechize parents, bringing them to a deeper sense of faith, then we let Christ do the rest. There’s a very direct relationship there,” he smiles.

RESPONDING TO EVOLVING NEEDS

While the population of Baker is predominantly Anglo, there are three Native American reservations and a robust Hispanic population. Three Catholic parishes serve the reservations.

Many of the Latinos came to the area years ago from Mexico as migrant workers in the orchards and farms. “The Hispanic community is less migratory and more stable now, with many second-generation families,” Hope says.

“We’re trying within the diocese to pull together the Anglo and Hispanic communities,” Hope says. “We’re not only providing resources in English and Spanish, we’re trying to bring people together as one church. We’re getting the word out about the New Evangelization and trying to promote the sense that we are all part of something bigger.”

“We want to help parents prepare their children for the sacraments,” she says. “English may be the effective first language of the children born here and they may learn better in English. But their parents are more comfortable with Spanish, so there has been a push

to make sure our catechetical materials are in both languages.”

An active Hispanic ministry effort incorporates Spanish into global programs offered throughout the diocese, rather than standing as an isolated ministry, Hope says. For example, Deacon Gustavo Ruiz, director of the Hispanic ministry, teaches well-attended classes in Natural Family Planning and trains Spanish-speaking trainers to lead classes in their own parishes.

MATCHING TEACHERS WITH SCHOOLS

There are five small Catholic elementary schools in the almost-67,000 square mile diocese. The largest has 150 students. The Diocese of Baker partners with the University of Portland to offer student teaching slots in Catholic schools. The Pacific Alliance for Catholic Education program also subsidizes salaries for Catholic school teachers and helps arrange communal housing for them.

The program, now entering its third year, is anticipated to feed teachers into the local Catholic schools. To date, four teachers have participated at two schools in the diocese.

KEEPING THE YOUTH ENGAGED

When the diocese realized there was a 71% drop-off in youth participation between First Communion and 12th grade, it turned to families and youth events. In addition to enhancing adult faith formation and supporting parents’



Families gather together to pray the Rosary at Family Camp.

efforts to catechize their children, the diocese energized its summer camp and retreat program.

As many as 600 youths participate during June, July, and November, according to Barry. After a recent summer visit to one of the camps at the diocesan retreat center, Bishop Cary wrote, “My spirits are high. This is becoming the gathering place for evangelization that it was meant to be. More and more of our youth have felt the pull of the Gospel net there, and they keep coming back for more.”

WILD WEST BEGINNINGS

The Diocese of Baker was established in 1903 when a single statewide diocese was divided to create the Dioceses of Portland and Baker. Hope describes resistance on the diocesan frontier to the naming of the new bishop. “Bishop Charles O’Reilly arrived in Baker by train. When he walked to the rectory, the parish priest met him on the front porch, waving a gun. The priest said, ‘We don’t need a bishop!’”

Hope says the issue was resolved when Bishop O’Reilly brought a few other supporters when he returned to the rectory.

Driving across wide-open terrain between parishes today, Barry says he is easily reminded of the Old West, with its itinerant preachers and roaming catechists going out to meet the people. “There’s a real joy to this. We’re bringing people usable, practical materials and helping catechists lead those they are serving into the richness of the faith.”

Bishop Cary reflects, “In my travels through the diocese, I look out on the same beautiful deserts and forests that Bishop O’Reilly saw a century ago. But the spiritual landscape has changed considerably, and we face challenges today that no one would have imagined in 1915. To help us meet them, we are blessed and grateful to have the support of Catholic Home Missions.”

DID YOU KNOW?

- It takes 4.5 hours by car to get from the chancery office in Bend to the diocesan Cathedral of St. Francis de Sales in Baker City. The chancery was moved from Baker to Bend in 1987 to be more centrally located within the diocese.
- Bend is the largest city in the diocese, with a population of 89,000 people.
- The Diocese of Baker covers 66,900 square miles. The 40,000 registered Catholics comprise less than 10% of the population.
- The diocese has the smallest number of registered Catholics in the continental United States.
- There are 36 parishes and 23 missions in the diocese. They are served by 35 priests, 9 permanent deacons, and 13 women religious.
- Fully 40% of active priests hail from outside the United States. The diocese conducts a workshop to help orient newcomers to the culture and traditions of the various Catholic populations they will encounter.
- Six seminarians are preparing for ordination. Three speak Spanish as a first language. Most are studying at Mount Angel Seminary in the Archdiocese of Portland.
- Five Catholic elementary schools serve 550 students in the diocese. There are no Catholic high schools or colleges.



For several years, St. Elizabeth parish in John Day prays live Stations of the Cross throughout the town.



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READ ABOUT HOW THE
Diocese of Baker is creating Christ-
centered communities in the high
desert of Oregon.



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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