



**CATHOLIC
HOME
MISSIONS**

Open Skies, Open Hearts



Grand Teton
Mountains rising up in
western Wyoming.

By Beth Griffin

Where the sagebrush-covered high plains stretch to the horizon in Wyoming, a visitor to the wide open spaces characteristic of the state might be forgiven for lapsing into childhood memories of Western movie double features.

For all its beautiful vistas at 6,000+ feet above sea level, Wyoming has very few people. Its population of 560,000 is the smallest in the United States, yet Cheyenne, the diocese that covers the entire state, has the largest land area of any diocese in the continental 48 states.

“We have high altitude and low multitude,” quips Matthew Potter, director of development and stewardship for Cheyenne. The diocese

receives funds from Catholic Home Missions (CHM) to help it minister to its 56,000 Catholics who are in mostly small parishes throughout the state. On average, there are 250 families in a parish.

The chancery office is located in Cheyenne in the southeast corner of the state. It is a seven-hour drive (in good weather!) to reach the farthest parish. Not surprisingly, travel and distance are the biggest challenges to ministry. Some towns are 100 miles apart, stretching the concept of “rural” all the way to “uninhabited” Matt says.

The unique landscape helps make Cheyenne parishioners faith-filled and independent, according to Matt. “We depend on their indomitable spirit. They know they have to take care of themselves,” he says.

Because the population is so small, Matt says it’s rare to drive to a distant town and not encounter familiar faces. “The people who live here wouldn’t have it any different.”

Energy drives the Wyoming economy. Mining and petroleum production provide much of the employment, so fluctuations in energy prices are keenly felt by the people in the diocese.

“Energy is our thing” Matt says. “It’s the biggest employer. Forty percent of coal used to generate electricity in the United States comes from Wyoming. Climate change is putting the crimps to us and the drop in oil prices affects us all.”

...continued on page 2

Neighbors

WINTER 2016

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear Friends,

You may notice an unfamiliar face here on the newsletter: I am Bishop Paul Etienne of the Diocese of Cheyenne, the

new chairman for the Subcommittee on Catholic Home Missions.

Originally from Indiana, I was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, but my assignments and studies have brought me all over the United States and even to Rome. In 2009, I became bishop of Cheyenne. It has been a privilege to serve God's people here, although serving a mission diocese does come with challenges.

As you will see in this newsletter, the Diocese of Cheyenne is the largest in the continental United States, but it is very sparsely populated. This makes it difficult to provide for all of the pastoral needs. However, this does not stop the faith from flourishing here.

The support from the Catholic Home Missions Appeal has been instrumental in the success of not only our ministries here in Cheyenne but also of mission dioceses across the United States.

I am excited to give you a glimpse into life of the Diocese of Cheyenne in this newsletter and even more so to begin my tenure as chairman of Catholic Home Missions.

I thank you for your continued support of this important collection that helps so many around the country grow in their faith.

Let us continue to pray for one another and for the strengthening of faith in our country.

In the Heart of Christ,

Bishop Paul D. Etienne
Diocese of Cheyenne

...continued from page 1

Agriculture and ranching are also significant employers, as are the Air Force and state and federal government entities. Two national parks, Grand Teton and Yellowstone, draw 6.3 million visitors a year to the state and support jobs in the tourism sector.

Wyoming's population is relatively homogenous. It is 98% Caucasian with some African-Americans and Hispanics. The Northern Shoshone and Arapaho Native Americans live together on the Wind River Reservation.

Cheyenne has 37 parishes and 35 missions. While missions comprise half of the churches, they serve fewer than 15% of the population. CHM supports these mission parishes and also helps sustain two priests who serve there as pastoral associates.

While most parishes have only one priest, St. Margaret in Riverton and St. Rose of Lima in Torrington have multiple mission responsibilities that are many miles apart. They need two priests to meet the Sunday and weekday needs of the parishioners. Having a second priest allows St. Rose to extend evangelization and sacramental ministries to underserved rural communities. The priest celebrates Sunday Eucharist, a daily Mass, and an evening Holy Hour once a week in outlying areas. He also conducts weekly adult education, RCIA, and catechism classes at different sites. His enthusiastic community outreach includes baking cinnamon rolls for regular post-Mass conversation and study sessions. The parish director of religious education used part of their CHM grant to host the Benedictine Sisters of St. Martin to conduct a week-long summer bible camp for parish youth.

The Diocese of Cheyenne uses CHM grants in its religious education program for middle and high school students and young adults. It runs a popular retreat program for young teens that draws high school students back to participate as group leaders

for subsequent retreats. Youth from ten parishes made the trip to a retreat facility in Colorado last year for the program. Cheyenne does not have its own retreat house.

High schoolers participated in a diocesan-wide gathering called "Planting the Seeds of Discipleship." Presenters were well-versed and educated in sharing their faith, Matt says, and each one had a master's degree in theology or was studying for the degree.



Altar for the annual Mass commemorating the first celebration of the Eucharist in Wyoming by Fr. Pierre-Jean De Smet, SJ, in 1840.

These diocesan-wide events build on and support earlier efforts to reinvigorate youth ministry at the parish level. They are organized by the assistant director of pastoral ministries and receive support from CHM. The office also hosts Life Chain, a local March for Life, and pro-life education events in nine locations throughout the diocese.

Hispanic ministry in Cheyenne is growing in response to the needs of the parishioners. One small mission with a large Latino congregation ran out of room for worshippers and ultimately moved a few miles and built a new church, which is now full, Matt says.

Our Lady of the Mountains Church in Jackson provides pastoral and sacramental support to an integrated community of English- and Spanish-speaking people. Many of the Latinos work in the hotels, restaurants, and construction businesses of the popular resort area and hail from the state of Tlaxcala in Mexico.

Mass is celebrated in Spanish on Friday and Sunday nights and there is a religious education program for parishioners who do not speak English. There are more than 300 students in the parish religious education program, many of whom are bilingual children of Mexican parents. Traditional Quinceañera and presentation ceremonies as well as joyful processions and Mass to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe draw Latino families to the church.

Cheyenne serves Native Americans in three churches. A priest and three religious sisters minister to people facing challenges associated with reservations, including addiction and great poverty, Matt says. He adds that there are more funerals in the three churches than elsewhere in the diocese, a reminder of the community's responsibility to provide pastoral and social support for its struggling members.

Across the state, there are 48 priests, most of whom are diocesan priests. There are six men preparing for ordination at three seminaries out of state, as well as 37 deacons who serve the parishes, missions, and ministries of the diocese. A new five-year formation program for deacons will begin in 2016. It will be taught by staff from St. Meinrad Seminary in Indiana. Candidates will gather in Casper for monthly classes.



Families joined together to celebrate Catholic Rural Life with an outdoor picnic.

Bringing in help from another place is ingrained in the history of the diocese. Belgian Jesuit Fr. Pierre-Jean De Smet brought Catholicism to Cheyenne more than 175 years ago. He celebrated the first Mass at an outdoor altar in Daniel, Wyoming, in July 1840. Now, there is an annual open air Mass of thanksgiving held at the site.

Bishop Paul D. Etienne was installed as the eighth bishop of Cheyenne in 2009. He says, "As a bishop of a mission diocese, I am extremely grateful for the assistance we receive through grants from Catholic Home Missions. The Diocese of Cheyenne operates with a small and highly efficient chancery staff, and everyone wears more than one hat in order to serve our parishes and institutions with basic ministries.

"For example, Home Mission grants allow us to support two staff people, who are highly qualified and well trained, who provide materials and support for youth ministry, outreach to young adults, religious education, Catholic schools, marriage and family life, peace and justice, and respect life. These ministries are thriving and growing in the Diocese of Cheyenne because of Catholic Home Missions," Bishop Etienne says.

"This is a welcoming Catholic community. There's nothing easy about what we're trying to get done here, but the faith has flourished because people appreciate its importance and are so dedicated," Matt says.



Because of the sparse population and shortage of priests, St. Edward Mission Church is staffed and attended to by a parish 20 miles away.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The Diocese of Cheyenne covers the entire state of Wyoming, almost 98,000 square miles. In a population of 560,000, approximately 56,000 are Catholic.
- There are 37 parishes and 35 missions in the diocese. They range in size from 2,500 registered families at the Cathedral of St. Mary in Cheyenne to remote missions with fewer than 25 families. Only four parishes have more than 1,000 families.
- The diocese is served by 35 diocesan and three religious priests and ten extern priests. There are also 16 retired priests, 37 deacons, 39 women religious, and six seminarians.
- In the diocese, there are seven Catholic elementary schools, no Catholic high schools, and one private college, Wyoming Catholic College.
- Bishop Paul Etienne drives more than 30,000 miles a year for pastoral visits within the diocese.
- Wyoming boasts two national parks: Yellowstone and Grand Teton. More than six million people visit the parks each year.
- Wry Wyoming humor: The state population is roughly equal to that of Akron, Ohio. One person described Wyoming as a "medium-sized city with very long streets."
- When filled to capacity (35,000 people), the University of Wyoming stadium effectively becomes the third largest city in the state.



Parishioners take a moment to spend time with their priest after Mass. Fr. Peter Johnson ministers to three parishes located 100 miles apart.



Strengthening the Church at Home

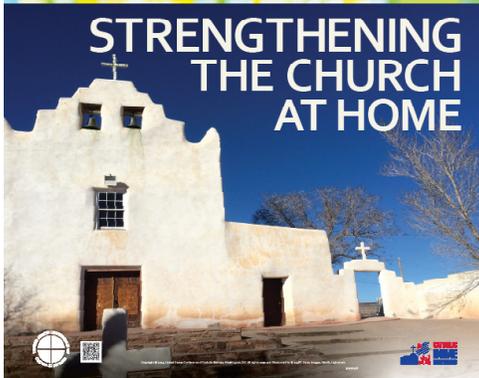
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READ ABOUT THE SPARSELY populated but deeply faithful communities that compose the Diocese of Cheyenne.



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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