



**CATHOLIC
HOME
MISSIONS**

Nurturing Vocations in the Home Missions



Ryan Ramirez (center), a seminarian from the Diocese of San Angelo, plays with his basketball team at Conception Seminary College in the 2017 Father Pat O'Malley Invitational Tournament.

San Angelo, Texas

“We’re trying to encourage Mexican-American vocations and develop a native clergy,” says Fr. Michael Rodriguez. He is the director of vocations and seminarians of the Diocese of San Angelo in west central Texas, a predominantly Hispanic area. His diocese is larger than the state of Indiana, and Catholics comprise less than ten percent of the population of its 29 counties.

Priests, parishioners, and perpetual adoration are important components to the vocations effort in San Angelo. Fr. Rodriguez says priests are dedicated and happy. “People love their priests and have confidence in them. If our kids don’t see priests who love the priesthood, what kind of draw is that?” he asks.

Over the last decade, weekly holy hours and perpetual adoration chapels were instituted throughout the diocese. An increase in vocations is one of the spiritual benefits of the ongoing prayer. In addition, Fr. Rodriguez says parishioners and priests are not shy about telling a young man he would make a good priest.

There are ten seminarians preparing to serve the diocese at four seminaries in Missouri, Illinois, Houston, and San Antonio. Ryan Ramirez, 22, is at Conception Seminary College in Conception, Missouri. He says he heard the call to priesthood after a summer mission trip to Italy, where he worked with the Missionaries of Charity. While his parents are now fully supportive, he says they were “caught by surprise and took it shockingly, because I never really opened up to them about it.”

By Beth Griffin

Seminary education is a significant expense for mission dioceses with strained budgets, but the thoughtful preparation of future priests is critical to the future of the Church, especially in areas challenged by long distances, few Catholics, or limited resources. Bishops in these dioceses rely on Catholic Home Missions grants to identify, form, and educate candidates for the priesthood. On average, a diocese spends \$35,000 to \$40,000 per seminarian during each year of study.

Each diocese approaches vocations formation and seminary education in a way that reflects its local culture and anticipated needs.

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Neighbors

SPRING 2017

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The call to the priesthood can be a challenging call to accept, but at the same time, it

is deeply peaceful. Those who know my story know I never would have chosen this life for myself. It is sheer gift, because God chose this life for me, and no doubt, created me for this life. Any time anyone gives him or herself fully and freely to God, they are launched on a journey they can never imagine.

As you will read in this newsletter, men in our home mission dioceses are accepting the gift of their vocation. These men are answering the call of Christ, and the dioceses are supporting them in their discernment.

But providing formation for seminarians comes with a cost that often stretches the budgets of home mission dioceses. It is through your support to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal that these dioceses can bridge that gap and provide seminarians with education and spiritual support. You make seminarian formation, and other pastoral programs, possible in so many dioceses.

I've included a map in this issue so that you can see how many of our neighbors here in the United States are considered mission territory.

Let us remember that the priest is not the only one who loves Jesus. He is not the only one sent by the Lord for some purpose that builds up the Body of Christ, the Church. Thank you for all you do to show your love for Jesus and build the Church.

In the Heart of Christ,

Paul D. Etienne

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

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Ryan's program of studies includes paid summer work as a laborer. He welcomes the challenge to be out of his comfort zone and work with a variety of people. He looks forward to his priesthood and the opportunity "to go out and serve God's people," particularly in youth ministry.

Bishop Michael Sis, bishop of San Angelo, reflects, "The formation of future priests for our missionary diocese in west Texas requires more financial resources than we have locally. We are very grateful to Catholic Home Missions for their support of seminary education of our young men. The spirit of solidarity in the hearts of Catholics around the country is a tremendous source of encouragement for us."

Superior, Wisconsin

"Every priest in the diocese is expected to be involved in vocations," says Fr. Thomas Thompson, director of vocations and seminarians for the Diocese of Superior in northern Wisconsin. In addition to identifying potential candidates for the priesthood, clergy lead prayers for vocations at every weekend Mass, he says. Like most vocations directors in mission dioceses, Fr. Thompson wears many hats, but he also has three other priests who serve as part-time regional associates.

The Diocese of Superior is a largely rural area with 103 parishes and two missions spread across almost 16,000 square miles. Catholics make up approximately 16 percent of the population.

Fr. Thompson is part of the 50 percent of vocations that come from outside the diocese. (He's originally from Minnesota.) The northern region covered by the Diocese of Superior is a popular vacation area for people in the Midwest, and many families plant deep seasonal roots there.

"Our challenge is to get homegrown vocations," he says. He draws on newly



Rich Rhinehart, a seminarian for the Diocese of Superior enjoys some time to say his morning prayers.

ordained priests to help promote and recruit and is encouraged by youth who have a "growing sense of the faith and of owning it."

Men study at seminaries in Minnesota and Milwaukee. There are currently two seminarians preparing to serve the Diocese of Superior.

At 46, Rich Rhinehart is older than most of his classmates at St. Francis de Sales Seminary. He's also a suburban Chicago native who spent summer vacations since he was a child with his parents in the north woods of Wisconsin.

Academically and professionally, Rich pursued aeronautics, business management, and human resources, before he realized he was called to the priesthood. When he called to tell his mother, she replied, "I know. I knew this would happen eventually." He chalks it up to "a mother's sixth sense."

"I never was listening to the Lord, maybe out of selfishness, or with an eye on family and career," he says. "But I finally started listening, and when I handed over my will to the Lord, it was very joyful."

Rich spent four years studying for the priesthood in the Archdiocese of

Chicago, but discerned through prayer and spiritual direction that although his vocation was very strong, "my heart was longing for the north woods." He left the seminary, worked for several months in Wisconsin and was accepted to the diocesan seminary program, where he picked up his studies in third-year theology. Rich hopes to be ordained for the Diocese of Superior in 2018.

"I look forward to being involved in parish life. Bringing people closer to the Lord is in my bones," he says. This will entail helping people understand the faith, perhaps through catechesis on church history and a focus on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, he explains.

Bishop James Powers, bishop of Superior, says "As a mission diocese, funds are always limited. The Catholic Home Missions grant allows us to accomplish things that we would otherwise not be able to do, including providing a diocesan-wide vocations curriculum for our schools and religious education programs, offsetting the cost of seminarian tuition, and distributing vocations prayer cards and posters to all of the parishes in our diocese. We are most grateful to CHM and are hopeful about the fruits our combined efforts will produce."

Alexandria, Louisiana

The Diocese of Alexandria is in the geographic center of the state of Louisiana. It is a rural diocese challenged by pervasive poverty. Less than nine percent of the population is Catholic.

Fr. Louis Sklar, director of vocations for the diocese, said a shift in focus helped create a welcome resurgence of vocations. Instead of recruiting primarily at Catholic schools and Catholic student centers, he and his predecessor concentrated on youth groups and parish education programs. "One-to-one contact gives us the strongest response," he says. The personal approach also

includes parishioners who ask young men to consider the priesthood, and later, priests who welcome seminarians as their brothers in a continuous line of service to the diocese.

"Vocations have not been in the forefront of families in our diocese. We've had many international clergy here to help us, but language and culture were a struggle and there was a disconnect between young people in the pews and older clergy, too," Fr. Sklar says. "Now, we send the seminarians out to the parishes in the summer. Along with the newly ordained local boys, they are evangelizing at the grassroots level and reviving the enthusiasm people have for the priests of our diocese."

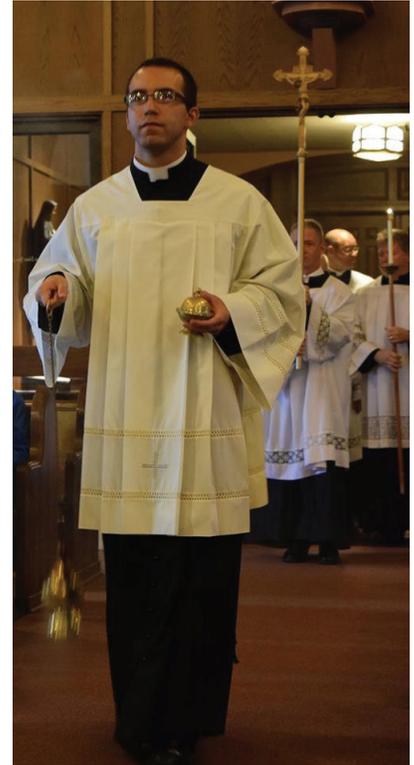
Men from the Diocese of Alexandria study in Ohio and Louisiana, as well as overseas in Italy. There are currently eleven seminarians preparing for ordination. Fr. Sklar says finances are a major concern, but he follows the guidance of recently retired Bishop Ronald Herzog who said of vocations, "We dream without a dollar figure limitation in mind."

Seminarian Luke LaFleur, 27, grew up in a parish near the St. Francis Xavier Cathedral in Alexandria and realized in eighth grade that he might have a calling to the priesthood. He says he put the idea on a back burner during college, while he earned a bachelor's degree in engineering. His friends and family were not surprised when he was accepted to the seminary.

Luke hopes to be ordained in 2018. He attends the Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, Ohio. During the summers, he worked in hospital ministry, parishes of different sizes, and went through a Spanish-language immersion program.

"I've loved the seminary. It has forced me to test my limits and stretch the boundaries," he says. And although some of his college classmates had their doubts, Luke says his engineering background came in handy, because "it forces you to think critically."

Luke looks forward to celebrating the sacraments and addressing the general challenges and responsibilities of being a priest. One of



Luke LaFleur, a seminarian from the Diocese of Alexandria serves at Mass at St. Francis Cabrini Church in Alexandria, LA.

the challenges he identifies is the need to get people in their 20s and 30s back to active participation in the Church.

A veteran vocations director said, "A sign of a healthy diocese is the number of local vocations it raises." Through its support of vocations formation and seminary education programs, Catholic Home Missions helps dioceses identify and train priests who will bring generations of parishioners closer to God. ☪



Strengthening the Church at Home

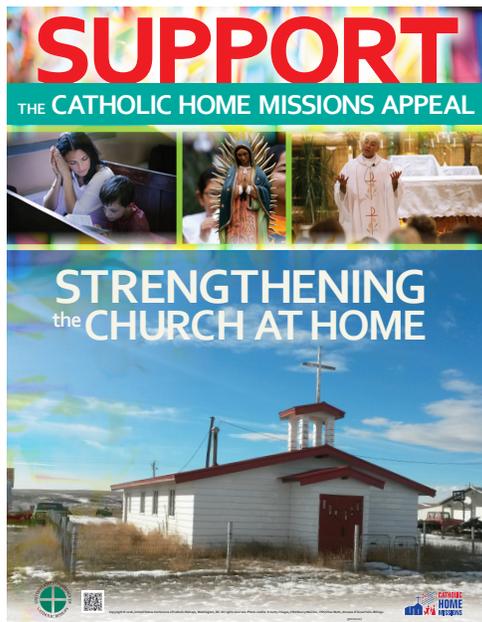
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READ ABOUT HOW mission dioceses across the United States are fostering and supporting priestly vocations.



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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