



United States
Conference of
Catholic Bishops

NEIGHBORS

A Quarterly Newsletter from Mission America

Bishop Francis Kalabat and a panel of parents and a medical doctor gather to answer questions about fertility and natural family planning on an episode of the "Shepherd's Call," a livestream program hosted by Bishop Kalabat on the Eastern Catholic Re-Evangelization Center's (ECRC) YouTube and Facebook pages.



Supported by funds it receives from the Catholic Home Missions Appeal, the Chaldean Catholic Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle is reaching young people and families through engaging digital communications efforts and faith-strengthening retreats that help make this "Church of Martyrs" a living sign of hope.

Catholic Home Missions Helps "a Church of Martyrs" Take Root and Grow in the United States

By Rhina Guidos

Their numbers may be small compared to many US dioceses, but they stand tall in history. Nestled in a suburb of Detroit, which has protected their language, customs, and practices in the United States for decades, their deeply guarded faith has flourished in recent years with help from Catholic Home Missions (CHM).

About 200,000 members make up the Chaldean Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle in Southfield, Michigan. The eparchy serves this group of Catholics who came to the United States largely from Iraq. The Chaldean Church is one of the 23 Eastern Catholic Churches, which have their own liturgical, historical, and cultural traditions, but whose bishops are in full communion with the pope and the Roman Catholic Church. "Eparchy" is the term used for dioceses in the Eastern Catholic Churches.

In their land of origin, where Christians are a religious minority among a mostly Muslim population, many found it difficult to openly carry out their religious practices because of repercussions that included kidnappings, massacres, harassment, destruction of property, and other forms of violence by extremists.

"We were always a persecuted Church. We were always on survival mode," said Bishop Francis Kalabat, head of the eparchy. "We were not only called a persecuted Church, but we were also called a Church of martyrs. When ISIS hit in Iraq [in 2014], it actually hit us especially hard in the Chaldean Church. We had monuments that were destroyed, a few of our churches, a few of our landmarks, a few of our monasteries and such, destroyed."

Like many churches of the East, Chaldean Catholics trace their origins back to the time of St. Thomas the Apostle in the first century. Bishop Kalabat noted that they also have a rich history as missionaries who attempted to spread the faith to places like China as early as the seventh century.

In the United States, proud descendants of that Church ended up in Southfield, where the first waves of Chaldeans arrived in the early- to mid-1900s. The first Chaldeans came to the United States seeking better economic conditions following a long history of genocide, massacres, and other violence that had destroyed their surroundings and their chances to thrive at home. Known for their entrepreneurial acumen, many set up small businesses, such as grocery stores,

FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On May 14, our new Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, welcomed the faithful from the 23 Eastern Catholic Churches that are in full communion with Rome for this year's Jubilee of Eastern

Churches. In his address to those assembled, he remarked, "I think of the diversity of your origins, your glorious history and the bitter sufferings that many of your communities have endured or continue to endure."

The Chaldean Catholic Church, founded by St. Thomas the Apostle in modern-day Iraq, is one such church, with a distinct liturgical tradition and history. Chaldean Catholics traditionally worship in Chaldean, also called Aramaic—the same language spoken by Jesus and his original disciples. For centuries, Chaldean Catholics have experienced hardship, war, and violent persecution. In recent years, the war in Iraq and the rise of extremist groups such as the Islamic State (ISIS) led many Chaldean Catholics to flee their homeland and come to the United States as refugees.

In this issue of *Neighbors*, you will be introduced to the Chaldean Catholic Eparchy (or diocese) of St. Thomas the Apostle, based in Detroit, Michigan, and learn how it is preserving the heritage of a people while also helping them sustain their faith in their new home in the United States. With crucial support received from the Catholic Home Missions Appeal, the eparchy organizes retreats for young people and adults, sustains a marriage and family ministry that helps couples strengthen their marriages, and welcomes refugees who have experienced trauma and arrive with language barriers that make it difficult for them to build new lives.

With gratitude for your ongoing commitment to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal that enables us to support such initiatives, I remain

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chad W. Zielinski".

Most Reverend Chad W. Zielinski
Bishop of New Ulm
Chairman, USCCB Subcommittee on
Catholic Home Missions



High school students build friendships as part of the eparchy's "The Call" youth conference.

that allowed them and their families to thrive near Detroit in the early 20th century. Others found work in Detroit's famous automobile industry, but all found ways to stay loyal to the Chaldean Church in a new land.

That mission became easier with the purchase of Mother of God, the first Chaldean Catholic church in Michigan, in January 1948. The building was consecrated later in August of that year. Then in 1985, Pope St. John Paul II elevated it from an apostolic exarchate of the United States of America for the Chaldeans to a full eparchy, or diocese, with its own bishop (also called an eparch). In 2002, a second eparchy for Chaldeans, the Eparchy of St. Peter the Apostle of San Diego, was erected in the western half of the United States from its territory.

As later waves of refugees arrived fleeing religious persecution that intensified in 2014, Chaldeans who had settled in the Detroit area welcomed them into the spiritual home they had set up.

It has now become a place where older generations can still attend Mass in the Chaldean, or Aramaic, language and where young Chaldean Catholics, who predominantly speak English as well as Arabic, can take part in retreats, marriage preparation, and youth programs to practice and deepen their ancient faith.

The Chaldean Church's language "goes back to Jesus' time," said Nadia Kallabat, the diocese's office administrator. She is not related to Bishop Kalabat, but her uncle Ibrahim Namu Ibrahim served as the eparchy's first bishop.

Though the Chaldean language is an important part of its proud heritage, the

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eparchy has adapted to deliver its programs in the dominant languages used by members in the United States.

"The vast majority of Masses are in English, and it's about 60% on any



Left: Bishop Kalabat leads the eparchy's annual Eucharistic procession. **Center:** High school boys and girls gather to worship at "The Call," the eparchy's youth conference. **Right:** Participants attend the "Two Foundations" weekend retreat for high school girls.

given Sunday," Bishop Kalabat said. "Then you've got about 40% [using] Arabic and modern Chaldean."

CHM has long supported the eparchy by subsidizing administrative costs as well as evangelization efforts.

"Sometimes, we were running behind, we held a lot of projects back because of either equipment we couldn't buy or someone we couldn't hire," said Nadia. "We didn't have somebody to do media and put it out there for public, making it available for them."

With help from CHM, the eparchy was able to buy a camera and other equipment that eventually helped them have a robust website, with a way to communicate about activities. The eparchy has since developed a newsletter, populated its social media channels, and even started a "Bible in a Year" podcast that includes reflections and readings from Bishop Kalabat. Though they were originally meant to serve the eparchy, the resources also help Chaldeans outside Michigan. The efforts have communicated the Word of God and touched a younger generation of Chaldeans.

"It's been amazing. It has transformed a lot of the younger generation," Nadia explained. "I know that for a fact, because one of my nieces is one of them."

Her niece went to Sunday Mass, but "that was about it," Nadia said. But after listening to the podcast, the niece has become more curious about Christianity and also her Chaldean roots.

"It transformed her, and she's so in love with it. It changed her whole life," Nadia said.

Reaching a younger generation of Chaldeans is of great importance to the community, observed Candice Raban, the eparchy's administrative director. Along with reaching younger

Chaldeans through its online presence, the eparchy also made an effort to boost in-person youth programs that include a Chaldean Church sports league, a Chaldean youth camp, and volunteer work to help Chaldeans still in Iraq by educating the younger generations in the United States about their plight. They also emphasize the legacy of Chaldean saints and modern martyrs like Chaldean Fr. Ragheed Ganni, who in 2007 was killed in Iraq along with three others by extremists.

The diocese has made a great effort to serve a diverse population of Chaldeans via retreats that focus on spiritual topics, said Candice, but also focus on women, healing, marriage preparation as well as marital separations, and ways to grow closer to God.

Candice herself attended one such retreat offered by the diocese when she was in high school, and she liked it so much that she started volunteering for the Church in her college years.

"It seemed very joyful and that they were living in this truth that I didn't know," she said. "So it was beautiful to watch that and then desire it, and then do everything I could to try to achieve it."

It's not just the topics that have grown, but the number of retreats as well.

"The retreats here have multiplied. There were maybe only two or three different retreats that the diocese used to offer," when she was a youth, Candice said. "And now we have about 15 to 17 a year, which is incredible."

Sometimes the eparchy repeats the themes and topics so those who couldn't get into the retreat but were on the waitlist can learn about them at a later retreat, she said.

"So it's been great to be able to give back in that same way and to see the thirst that

people have for Jesus and for his Church," Candice said.

The big challenge is meeting the demand for those interested in the programs.

"I'm still so humbled and so in awe about how many people come through the ministry each year," she said. "We do two silent retreats a year, two continuing retreats a year, and the waitlists have over 50 people each time."

The eparchy also takes on tougher pastoral challenges, such as helping refugees who have arrived and are dealing with trauma.

"There was a set of brothers who didn't speak English very well. They were fairly new to the country. They actually witnessed their dad die in front of them," recalled Bishop Kalabat.

Forced to flee their native country, the brothers had to start working at a young age to survive, meaning they also had to put their education aside. Not only could they not read or write in English when they arrived in the United States, but they couldn't read or write in any language at all, which made helping them a challenge.

"Obviously, we're trying to concentrate on evangelization, but there are a lot of other things we try to do as a Church," Bishop Kalabat continued. "We're trying to maintain and yet build at the same time, and it's not easy."

However, with steady support from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the eparchy has continued in its journey.

"I don't think we could do much without assistance from the Catholic Home Missions Appeal," said Bishop Kalabat. "Year after year, it's the generosity of the USCCB's Catholic Home Missions that says to us, 'Maybe we're doing something right, maybe we need to build on that.' And that's what we want to do." ☕



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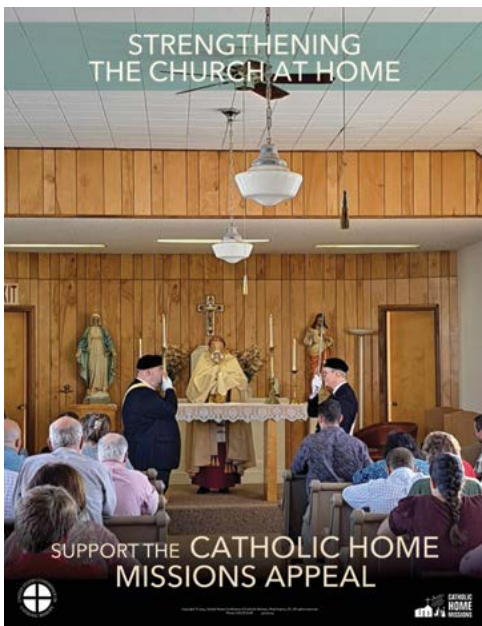
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Did you know?

- The Chaldean Catholic Church is one of 23 Eastern Catholic churches in communion with the pope that have their own liturgical and cultural heritage. Chaldean Catholics come from modern-day Iraq and trace their history to St. Thomas the Apostle.
- Beginning in 2014, attacks by violent extremists from the Islamic State (ISIS) caused many Chaldean Catholics to flee Iraq and resettle as refugees in the United States. Your support of Catholic Home Missions enables the Chaldean Catholic Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle to address the unique pastoral needs of refugees while also reaching and strengthening the faith of US-born Chaldean young people and families.
- In August 2019, Bishop Francis Kalabat submitted documentation advancing the canonization cause of Fr. Ragheed Ganni and five other Chaldean Catholic martyrs who were killed in Iraq by violent extremists. To learn more about Fr. Ganni and his companions, visit chaldeanchurch.org/chaldean-martyrs/.



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