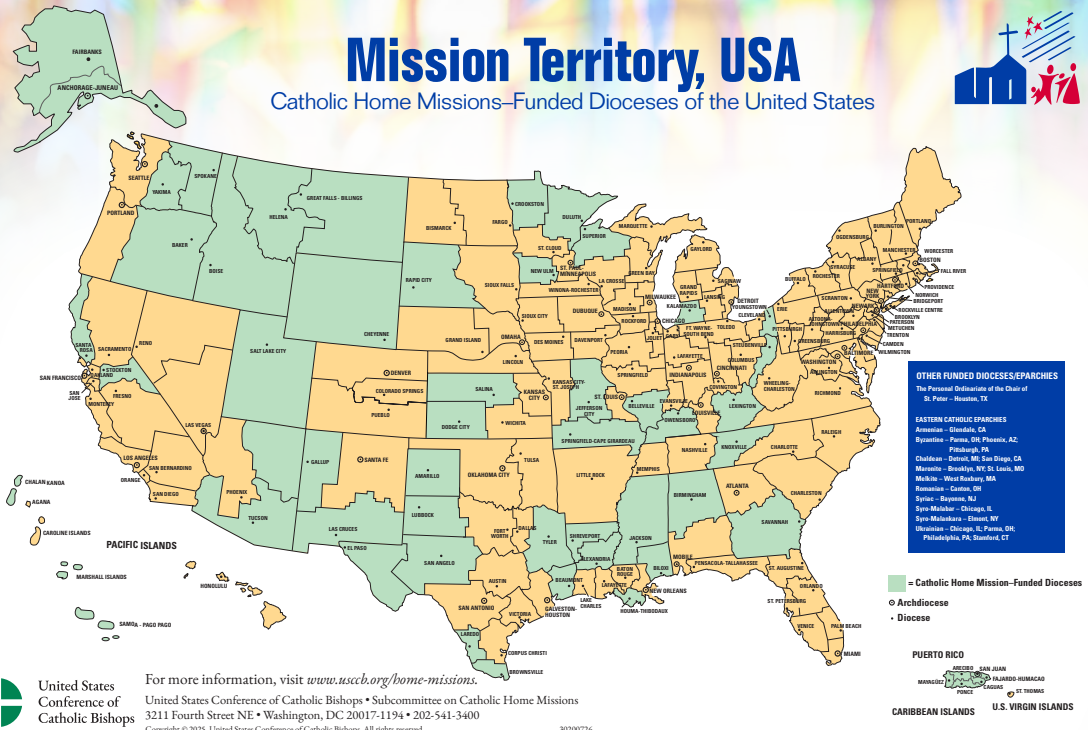




“Mission Territory, USA” map depicts the number and geographic diversity of dioceses, shaded in green, served by Catholic Home Missions.



Seventy Latin rite dioceses and Eastern Catholic eparchies in the United States and its territories lack the resources they require to support parish operations, pastoral ministries, and the formation of seminarians without outside financial assistance. Called home mission dioceses, these dioceses and eparchies rely on the support of Catholic Home Missions to keep their parish doors open and to educate the next generation of believers in the Catholic faith.

## “What Is a Home Mission Diocese?” Catholic Home Missions Staff Describe Mission Territory, USA

By Catholic Home Missions Staff

The Catholic Church in the United States—including its territories and its former protectorates in the Pacific Ocean—is called to mission. Every day, the faithful in Latin rite dioceses and Eastern Catholic eparchies across the country carry out this mission in parish Masses, religious education and faith formation classes, family ministries, and other initiatives that prepare clergy and laypeople to become disciples living and proclaiming the Gospel to their neighbors. Does this make them all mission territories? Yes and no.

While you may consider this vague answer as sign that we have been in Washington, DC, too long, one can use different criteria to answer the question, What is “mission territory”? Over the centuries of church history, many geographic areas that once were designated “mission territory” have matured to a level of self-sufficiency that means the label no longer applies. Pope Pius X found this to be the case for the entire country when he noted that the Church in the United States no longer belonged under the supervision of the Vatican’s

Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith—the congregation for mission territories at the time—in the 1908 apostolic constitution *Sapienti Consilio*.

Yet the bishops of the United States realized that many areas in the United States still lacked both personnel and financial resources to be truly self-supporting. Under the leadership of Cardinal George Mundelein, then-archbishop of Chicago, the American Board of Catholic Missions (ABCM)—the predecessor of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Subcommittee on Catholic Home Missions—was established and approved by the Vatican in 1924.

ABCM initially received a 40% share of the Mission Sunday collection, managed by the US Office of the Propagation of the Faith, as its funding source. That arrangement continued until 1995, when the ABCM share of the Mission Sunday collection began decreasing each year, from 40% to 25% in equal stages, until 1999. After 1999, ABCM expected to receive no funds from the Mission Sunday collection.

# FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When you hear the term “mission territory,” you might think of places far away from the United States, or you might reflect on

the Church centuries ago, when saints such as Junípero Serra, Isaac Jogues, and Jean de Brébeuf preached the Gospel in North America. You might be surprised to learn, therefore, that mission territory is not just a place overseas or from yesteryear—it is a living reality today for many Catholics in the United States.

Mission territory today includes places where small Catholic populations travel long distances over rough terrain to attend Mass when a priest is available, where economic hardships mean pastoral needs are greater than resources, and where vital ministries cannot be sustained without outside support. Currently 70 Latin rite dioceses and Eastern Catholic eparchies in the United States and its territories are US mission territories who receive support from the Catholic Home Missions Appeal.

In this issue of *Neighbors*, you will get an inside perspective on the work of Catholic Home Missions (CHM), learning what a home mission diocese is and the practical ways that CHM helps Catholics in these mission territories today. Your support for the annual Catholic Home Missions Appeal makes possible your spiritual and financial solidarity with mission territories and allows you to share in the never-ending gratitude of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

As I add my own gratitude to theirs, I remain

Yours in Christ,

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



Catholic Home Missions grants to the Diocese of Belleville help the Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIUC) Newman Catholic Student Center provide Catholic college students with a place to gather for prayer as well as for social activities such as this Super Bowl party in 2023.

Faced with the potential loss of support for home mission dioceses, the US bishops responded by approving a new national collection: the Catholic Home Missions Appeal. This annual appeal, taken in most dioceses on the fourth Sunday in April, is the primary source of funding for Catholic Home Missions (CHM) grants. The appeal is also an opportunity to educate US Catholics regarding mission needs and to invite them to assist fellow Catholics in the practice of the faith.

Under the direction of the USCCB Subcommittee on Catholic Home Missions, the CHM office identifies and supports the Latin rite dioceses and Eastern Catholic eparchies that are in greatest need, designating them as Catholic home missions.

While the number may change slightly from year to year, 70 dioceses and eparchies are currently considered Catholic home mission dioceses or eparchies in the lower 48 states and beyond, including US territories. These 70 dioceses and eparchies struggle to provide basic pastoral services without outside financial assistance. These services include access to the sacraments, including the Eucharist, as well as religious education, faith formation, and the formation of seminarians, priests, permanent deacons, and the laity.

These Catholic home missions typically have the following in common:

- Less than \$15 million in unrestricted assets
- Few Catholics—constituting 10% or less of the area’s total population
- Difficult rural terrain, extreme weather, and isolated locations of parishes and missions
- A severe shortage of priests, deacons, and skilled pastoral workers

- A high rate of poverty, unemployment, and low wages
- A lack of Catholic institutions—religious houses, schools, colleges, hospitals, and retreat centers—to support evangelization and religious education
- Immigrant populations and members of minority racial and cultural groups who need special pastoral support
- A lack of interest in, or outright hostility toward, Catholicism or religion in general in the local culture

Currently, 85% of CHM funding goes toward seminarian education, mission parish and diocesan support, and faith formation programs. The remaining 15% supports emergency assistance, professional development of lay diocesan staff, the expenses associated with installing a new bishop, and special initiatives. Without financial assistance, these mission dioceses and eparchies would struggle to educate future priests, keep parish doors open, provide the sacraments, and teach the Catholic faith.

In 2026, more than \$7 million will be distributed to these dioceses and eparchies. To receive funds from the annual Catholic Home Missions Appeal, a diocese or eparchy must submit an extensive application regardless of whether it has previously received funds or is asking for the first time. The application includes detailed descriptions of financial and pastoral challenges, audited financial statements, and summaries of the programs for which funding is requested. This last requirement ensures the supported programs’ fidelity to Catholic teachings. A final report on how previous funding was used by those who received financial support the prior year is also required, ensuring that applicants have respected the spirit in which donations to CHM are



**Left:** A member of the SIUC Newman Catholic Student Center reads from the ambo at Mass in 2022. **Right:** Fr. Joseph A. Brown, SJ, celebrates Mass at the Newman Catholic Student Center at SIUC in the Catholic home mission Diocese of Belleville.

## The Catholic Home Missions Appeal—an annual special collection held in many US dioceses on the last Sunday in April—provides a wonderful opportunity to become true brothers and sisters to our brothers or sisters in Christ.

made. These reports encourage accountability on the part of the recipients and assist CHM in being good stewards of donor funds.

Field visits by a member of the CHM staff are often conducted to ensure a complete understanding of needs and the use of requested funding. During these visits, conversations with the bishop, chief financial officer, ministry directors, and other diocesan and parish leaders are crucial. CHM staff commonly must travel to affected communities in remote areas using off-road vehicles, small planes, and boats.

The maximum yearly request currently is \$125,000. However, if funds are available, grants above \$125,000 are sometimes awarded to the “poorest of the poor.” Often, these dioceses have less than \$1 million in total unrestricted assets, fewer than 50 diocesan priests, parishes with fewer than 50 parishioners, and fewer than 25 employees in the diocesan offices. For some mission dioceses, funding from CHM is truly a lifeline. Most grants total less than \$100,000.

Ten years ago, CHM provided nearly \$10 million to mission dioceses. Today, because dioceses in the United States are increasingly not participating in the annual Catholic Home Missions Appeal or are combining it with another collection, CHM can provide only \$7 to \$8 million in grants each year. This diminishes CHM’s ability to support vital ministries to rural areas of the country and to historically underserved groups.

The Catholic Home Missions Appeal—an annual special collection held in many US dioceses on the last Sunday in April—provides a wonderful opportunity to become true brothers and sisters to our brothers or sisters in Christ. It offers us a chance to walk with Christ, proclaim that he came to reveal the face of God, and help all to understand that Christ—by his Cross and Resurrection—brought salvation to the entire world, including parts of America that often seem to be forgotten.

Dioceses and eparchies who benefit from your support of CHM experience benefits that are best illustrated by the many letters of gratitude we receive in our office:

- “Your generous support of this once-in-a-lifetime event for a mission diocese (Beatification of Friar Pedro de Corpa and Companions) makes such an impact on all those we serve. Thank you very much for this blessing on our Diocese.”—Keliann Whitney, Associate Director for Development, Diocese of Savannah

- “I am grateful to . . . the bishops, staff, and donors to Catholic Home Missions, for your assistance to the Eparchy of St. Maron each year. Your support makes a great difference!”—Bishop Gregory John Mansour, Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn
- “We are extremely thankful for the goodness you bring to the Church and to our community, and we look forward to using this gift from God to accomplish his work. Please extend our thanks to the entire organization for their generosity.”—Bishop Myron J. Cotta, Diocese of Stockton
- “For over ten years, this diocese has been blessed with these grants, and for them all we are extremely grateful. They regularly make a difference in our ability to proclaim the good news in southern Illinois.”—Very Rev. Godfrey Mullen, OSB, Diocesan Administrator, Diocese of Belleville
- “As a small mission diocese, our local sources of income remain limited and insufficient to adequately cover these essential administrative obligations. Ensuring sufficient funding for the diocesan administration is therefore critical to maintain continuity in pastoral care and sustaining the sacramental life of our communities.”—Bishop Romeo D. Convocar, Diocese of Chalan Kanoa (Northern Mariana Islands) ☩



The Diocese of Dodge City organizes “Marriage as Sacrament” and “Engaged Encounter” weekend retreats and workshops for couples seeking to build lasting, loving marriages. With support it receives from Catholic Home Missions, the diocesan Office of Hispanic Ministry has been able to make Spanish-language sessions of this program more widely available to the region’s growing Latino population.



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Issue 1 2026



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[www.usccb.org/home-missions](http://www.usccb.org/home-missions)

Our work is supported by the annual collection taken up in US dioceses. If you missed your parish collection, you may send your donation to: USCCB Office of National Collections | PO Box 96278 | Washington, DC 20090-6278. Please make checks payable to USCCB-Catholic Home Missions Appeal.



#iGiveCatholic accepts contributions to support the Catholic Home Missions program. Use this QR code to make an online gift.

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