



**CATHOLIC
HOME
MISSIONS**

Modern Technology Builds a Learning Community



Fr. Bob Schremmer teaching in Dodge City. Photo courtesy of the Diocese of Dodge City.

What's more satisfying than solving a persistent problem? Sharing the creative solution with a neighboring diocese!

In Kansas, the dioceses of Dodge City and Salina use modern technology to reach across 50,000 square miles of prairie and steppe with a vibrant pastoral ministry formation program. The joint program, "Church in Partnership," re-vamps the traditional model of solitary distance learning by gathering small groups of people to participate in lectures broadcast from other parts of the state.

Kansas is a big state. Dodge City and Salina are two of

the four dioceses in Kansas. They are largely rural and the Catholic population in the two areas is about 17 percent of a total population of a half million people. The two dioceses are located in the western half of the state, where rolling plains meet flat steppe lands. Both dioceses receive grants from Catholic Home Missions.

In the dioceses, small towns are surrounded by wheat fields, cattle ranches, and acres of corn, punctuated with grain elevators, wind turbines, and oil and gas-drilling rigs. Amid this backdrop, meat-processing plants employ a growing number of Hispanic and Somali immigrants drawn to the state in search of work.

Fewer than 90 priests serve 135 parishes in the two dioceses. The largest city-based parishes have as many as 4,000 families while the smallest parishes have fewer than 100. Most priests serve multiple small parishes and missions, many of which are located in remote, rural areas.

It's a huge challenge to offer high-quality spiritual and pastoral formation to eager, faith-filled people who are separated by vast distances.

In 1997, the Diocese of Dodge City began to use Interactive Television (ITV), which was already a familiar feature of rural classrooms. The diocese joined with Newman University, a Catholic institution in Wichita operated by the Adorers of the Blood of Christ congregation, to offer adult formation classes. These classes originated in two central sites and were broadcast to school and parish locations throughout the diocese. In 2012, the Diocese of Salina joined what is now called the Church in Partnership program. There are now 18 sites for the Pastoral Ministry Formation program, where adult students meet to share the learning experience.

The technology, including equipment and wiring, is contemporary and advanced. It has become more portable since the program began. Both dioceses have invested

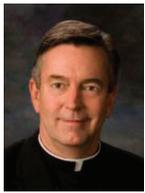
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Neighbors

SUMMER 2014

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear Friends,

What if the distance of your parish from your home and the rising cost of gas prevented you from participating in parish events? Many Catholics in the U.S. live in well-populated areas with plenty of opportunities for fellowship and community at their parishes. But for most living in the home missions, this level of support is not the case.

The dioceses of Salina and Dodge City in Kansas face many challenges, including the demands imposed by their vast geographical areas. Lay ministers and priests must travel long distances to meet with parishioners and administer the sacraments. Lengthy travel also affects diocesan staff who often are not able to meet their peers and exchange ideas or attend learning workshops and classes.

The two dioceses came up with a creative solution to these isolating effects of distance. In this issue of *Neighbors*, read about their approach to pastoral ministry classes and the creative ways that they are using new technology to build community.

Thank you for your generosity in our annual appeal this past April. **We are able to continue helping needy dioceses only because of donations from Catholics like you.** Your gift will continue to support basic ministries in 84 home mission dioceses and provide an opportunity for each parishioner there to live out his or her faith.

As we continue living our faith in this summer season, I ask that God bless you and your families and bring you an abundance of his peace. Together, let us continue strengthening the Church at home.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Peter F. Christensen
Diocese of Superior

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funds to establish, maintain, and trouble-shoot the technology at a high level because the program is critical for reaching remote areas, especially during protracted bad weather.

The program also strengthens the community component of the Catholic faith. “We made the decision to use cutting edge technology because we didn’t want people further isolated by sitting alone in a basement at midnight getting their formation from a computer,” said Fr. Bob Schremmer, Vicar General of Dodge City. “We wanted two or three or four or more to gather together to share the ecclesial dimension of the experience.”

Coleen Stein, director of ITV and adult formation for Dodge City, said the subject experts or teachers are located at eight transmitting sites in “smart classrooms” equipped with document cameras, computers, and the twenty-first century equivalent of an overhead projector. From there, they can present a lecture illustrated with Power Point documents and live access to Internet websites. Students assembled at the receiving sites at parish centers, hospitals, and religious education classrooms can interact with the teacher and all of the other students orally and visually.

“In 17 years, 664 people have participated in one or more of the 82 Church in Partnership courses,” Coleen said, “including 42 people who completed

the requirement of 30 college credits for a degree in pastoral ministry awarded by Newman University or a diocesan diploma.” Eight core courses and six electives are offered repeatedly over a four-year period on topics including Old Testament theology, New Testament, Christian morality and society, and sacred theology. Coleen said the classes are recorded on DVD as a back-up, but students are required to attend 75 percent of the sessions to get credit for the courses.

There are currently 66 students enrolled in core and elective courses. Fr. Schremmer said students include staff and volunteers in pastoral formation, vocations, safe environment, religious education, and the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, as well as people seeking spiritual enrichment and greater involvement with the faith.

Fr. Frank Coady, director of worship, lay formation, and deacons for the Diocese of Salina, said there were people who went on to seminary, diaconate, and master’s programs after completing the ITV program. The diocese plans to use ITV for deacons’ continuing education classes. Fr. Kerry Ninemire, Vicar General of Salina, said the deacons spend one weekend a month together in study and prayer, which gives them an opportunity to build community.

Fr. Coady said avoiding costly and time-consuming driving was an attractive feature of the Church in Partnership program. Also, it allows the two dioceses to deploy their best instructors for the benefit of all the students. Even before Salina joined the partnership, its clergy and religious had been recruited as instructors. “In the past, there was a plethora of priests and nuns to teach, and gas was cheap. Many are now retired or dead—and not all priests are natural instructors just because they have a divinity degree,” Fr. Coady observed.

Reaction to the interactive distance learning has generally been



The Prayer and Action project combines service for those in need with spiritual training for the participants. Photo courtesy of the Diocese of Salina.

DID YOU KNOW?



Ten permanent deacons were ordained in June 2013, joining six others already in service in the Diocese of Salina. A third group of candidates are currently discerning and studying. Photo courtesy of the Diocese of Salina.

positive, Fr. Schremmer said. "It's second-best to being in the same room with the instructor, but the trade-off is not having to drive so far. And there are benefits that come from presenting from a smart classroom," he said. As an instructor himself, Fr. Ninemire noted the ITV program requires more preparation.

"Pastoral Ministry Formation is a blessing for our diocese," said Bishop John B. Brungardt of Dodge City. He expressed gratitude for Catholic Home Missions' support of the Church in Partnership, continuing, "It equips participants to fulfill the roles to which they are called by their baptism and for which their gifts and the needs of the times challenge them, whether in formal ministries or the particularly lay ministry of permeating social, political, and economic realities of our world. Delivery of this blessing through our ITV system is grace added upon grace."

Beyond the faith formation aspect, ITV has been used in the two dioceses for priest council meetings, briefings on the Affordable Care Act and health insurance, accounting software training, safe environment training, Spanish classes, and the preparation of chaperones for the National Catholic Youth Conference. In addition, people with college credits can earn a bachelor's degree in elementary education

from Newman University through the Church in Partnership program.

In the future, Fr. Ninemire predicts that Church in Partnership might host workshops and retreats from other dioceses. "You can get these things on the Internet or a flash drive, but you miss out on the connection with the diocese and other students. We're not individuals, we're a community and if we're connected, it's more ecclesial," he said.



A diocesan assembly in Hays in 2010 to initiate a four-year pastoral plan for the Diocese of Salina included a Eucharistic procession across town. Photo courtesy of the Diocese of Salina.



Prayer and Action is a summer mission project that draws nearly 400 youth to help those in need in the Diocese of Salina. Two towns in the diocese are selected each year for the seven-week service project. Photo courtesy of the Diocese of Salina.

- The Diocese of Dodge City covers 28 counties. Its 49 parishes include 7 Catholic grade schools. They are served by 18 diocesan and 13 visiting priests, 11 women religious, and 5 seminarians.
- Dodge City describes itself as the only diocese in the United States that does not have an interstate highway, military installation, or public four-year college within its territory.



Bishop Brungardt introduces a speaker. Photo courtesy of the Diocese of Dodge City.

- The Diocese of Salina has 86 parishes, 11 Catholic grade schools, and 5 Catholic high schools in 32 counties. They are served by 56 priests, 31 women religious, and 9 seminarians.



St. Joseph Church in Damar, northwest Kansas, a small mission parish. The ornate church, built by French Catholic settlers, was restored in 2007. Photo courtesy of the Diocese of Salina.

- Syndi Larez, director of stewardship and development for Salina, has a 100-minute daily commute each way from urban Wichita, where she was a 10-year employee of the Wichita diocese. "It was an eye-opener to step foot in a mission diocese. The distances are vast and affect everything we do. Communication in a small diocese has to be completely transparent, and we all wear many hats," she said.
- Farm consolidation, corporate farming, and an aging population of priests and parishioners are a challenge to the vitality of rural parishes.
- Seminarians are required to learn Spanish to help meet the pastoral needs of Hispanics, who are the youngest and fastest-growing group in the Church.



Strengthening the Church at Home

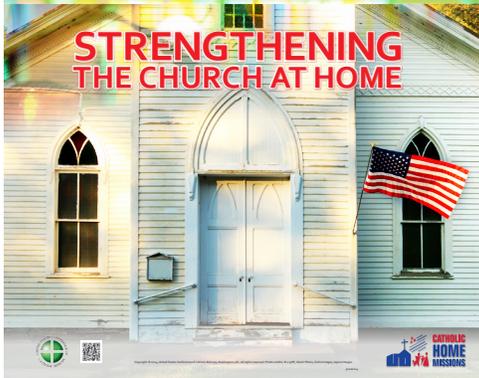
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SUMMER 2014

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ACROSS THE VAST DISTANCES of western Kansas, two dioceses use modern technology to build community among their pastoral ministers. Read inside to learn about this innovative approach to faith formation.



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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