



**CATHOLIC
HOME
MISSIONS**

Hispanic Ministry in the Home Missions



Members of the growing Hispanic community in the Diocese of Knoxville gather after Mass around an Our Lady of Guadalupe image.

By Beth Griffin

Hispanic Catholics are the youngest and fastest growing segment of the Catholic Church in the United States. Their deep faith enriches parish communities throughout the country, while presenting both opportunities and challenges to traditional pastoral ministry. Mission dioceses, already accustomed to stretching slim financial and personnel resources to serve a geographically widespread Catholic population, have developed thoughtful approaches to this flourishing ministry.

In this issue, we look at creative uses of Catholic Home Missions funds to advance Hispanic Ministry in three dioceses.

The **Diocese of Knoxville, Tennessee**, boasts both one of the smallest percentages of Catholics among the general population (2.5 percent) and the third fastest-growing Hispanic population in the country. Since 2000, the

number of Hispanics has more than doubled to 86,000. Most are Catholics.

Lourdes Garza, director of Hispanic ministry, describes three waves of migration to the east Tennessee area. Professionals were drawn to technical jobs in the Oak Ridge corridor in the 1970s. Agricultural and construction workers and hospitality industry employees arrived from Mexico and Central America in the 1980s, followed in the 1990s by bilingual entrepreneurs drawn by the opportunity to serve Spanish-speakers. In addition, there has always been a seasonal influx of migrant workers in the spring and summer.

Today, Mass or weekly prayer services are celebrated in Spanish at 31 of the diocese's 51 parishes and missions.

The diocesan ministry program began as direct action, accompanying people to doctor's appointments and helping to access social services, but evolved into a robust pastoral operation with a focus on developing lay leadership and supporting evangelization. "We're creating leadership through organization, formation, and participation," Lourdes says. "The goal is to live our faith, evangelize in all our surroundings, embrace our brothers and sisters, recognize our cultural diversity, improve our quality of life in solidarity, and continue the mission of Jesus to create the reign of God on earth."

"We help people develop leadership skills and a better understanding of their faith. Then, the parish leaders can identify other parishioners to help them develop programs appropriate to their small faith communities," she says.

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Neighbors

SUMMER 2016

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I'm excited to present this issue of *Neighbors* where we look at Hispanic ministry in three of our

mission dioceses. As you will see, the Hispanic population in some dioceses has been present for years, in others it is a newer population, and for some it is a population that comes and goes with the seasons.

We are called to serve all of our brothers and sisters, to meet their pastoral needs, and support them in their cultural traditions. For many mission dioceses this can be difficult, as resources are sparse. As the Hispanic population grows in the United States, so does the need for quality Hispanic ministry. Thankfully, we have many wonderful staff members who are dedicated to providing this important ministry to the faithful.

And we also have you. Your support of the Catholic Home Missions makes programs like these possible. Your faithful support brings these ministries to life and helps our neighbors as they continue to grow in the Catholic faith.

Join me in praying for our home mission dioceses and all whom they serve, especially those who are new to our country. Thank you for your support. May God bless you and all you do.

In the Heart of Christ,

Most Reverend Paul D. Etienne, DD,
STL
Bishop of Cheyenne

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The Diocese of Knoxville uses materials developed by the Miami-based Southeastern Pastoral Institute. "We're not replicating programs, we're collaborating, and we benefit from the experience of others," Lourdes says.

The Knoxville Hispanic Ministry's popular Marriage Encounter program has drawn more than 200 couples over the past three years, providing the foundation for a growing youth and family ministry program, according to Lourdes. "Parents formed through the Marriage Encounter are open to parenting and Natural Family Planning classes because they see the advantages of building up their marriages," she says.

"We're also working with other diocesan offices so ministry to Hispanics is collaborative and not parallel. For example, if there is a diocesan training program, we try to do it together at the same place, with the same material, but have different presenters for Spanish-speakers," Lourdes explains.

The biggest hurdle to her expanding program is the uncertainty of participants' legal status. "They're not sure if they'll be here tomorrow. The only piece of paper we require is a baptismal certificate, but legal documentation is a big black veil over everybody," Lourdes says. Yet, amid the challenges of uncertainty in residency, the region's Hispanic Catholic population continues to thrive.

Bishop Richard F. Stika describes Knoxville as a small diocese with great expectations. He says in the past two years, more than 1,600 Latinos have been welcomed through Baptism, 1,300 have received first Holy Communion, and more than 5,000 attend Masses in Spanish at local parishes and missions. "We're blessed, but the numbers are illuminating. Quite frankly, without Catholic Home Missions, our diocese wouldn't be able to meet these needs," he says.

Hispanics are relative newcomers to the **Diocese of Jackson, Mississippi,**

but they are a young, active, faith-filled group, and their presence expands the small, earnest Catholic footprint in a state where Baptists predominate the Christian landscape. Geographically, Jackson is the largest diocese east of the Mississippi River. Catholics comprise 2.3 percent of the population and are served at 73 parishes and 19 missions spread across 38,000 square miles.

Br. Ted Dausch, CFC, coordinator of the Office of Hispanic Ministry for the diocese, says Mass is offered in Spanish at 28 parishes that include migrants from Mexico and Central America. "It's a real challenge because the Spanish-language Mass may be the total extent of the ministry in some parishes. Only seven of our priests are fluent in Spanish, and very few people in the state are bilingual, so there is a gap between the pastoral leadership and the community," Br. Ted says.

The diocese bridges the gap through active training of Latino laity at the Southeastern Pastoral Institute. "More



A couple pray and dedicate their baby to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

than 150 people have participated in the program, achieving certifications in Old and New Testament, sacraments, and liturgy. People are very involved in the life of the Church!" he says.

In addition, 90 couples joined the Christian Family Life Movement and have established small groups and base worship communities. "People who were not initially participating in the Church are now totally committed to the life of the parish. They are marrying in the Church and their children receive the sacraments," Br. Ted says.

Eighteen years ago, when he arrived in Jackson, Hispanic ministry in the

diocese was limited to Spanish-language Mass at a handful of parishes. Now Spanish-language Masses are offered throughout the diocese, and the challenge is to bring a flourishing Hispanic ministry to each parish as a part of pastoral outreach. Br. Ted reflects, “We’ve made great strides, but we are still only laying the foundation. The strength is in the laity and the growing youth ministry. It’s a blessing to see the journey of courageous people with tremendous faith.”



The community from St. Peter Cathedral process with a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Jackson Square with the Mississippi state capitol in the background.

Bishop Joseph R. Kopacz says, “Our Hispanic Ministry Office is the cornerstone for our service to our immigrant and first- and second-generation populations who within their communities comprise a very diverse population. The needs can be daunting, but we are blessed with many dedicated staff and volunteers who faithfully and effectively serve the many Hispanics in our midst.”

When the **Diocese of Kalamazoo, Michigan**, was established in 1971, migrant ministry was identified as a priority. “We try to continue that vision and improve on the rich history and strong foundation,” says M. Veronica Rodriguez, associate director of parish life and lay leadership for the diocese.

Michigan has the country’s fifth largest population of migrant farmworkers, and the Diocese of Kalamazoo is home

to the largest segment of that population, many of whom are Hispanic Catholics housed in 415 migrant camps. Veronica says most are Mexicans, working in agriculture, meat-packing, dairies, and plant nurseries.

The area has experienced a 315 percent increase in Hispanic population since 1990, and more than 60 percent are under 25 years of age.

The diocese has ongoing ministry to long-time Hispanic parishioners, including leadership formation, trauma counseling, and well-attended Quinceañera retreats for teen girls and their parents. “This is an opportunity to catechize the population and go back to the significance and origin of the Quinceañera celebration as a religious event, not only a social one. It also gives youth a chance to develop as leaders in the Church and society,” Veronica says.

There is a special emphasis on the pastoral needs of migrants in the summer. Visiting missionary priests, diocesan staff, and more than 100 parish volunteers fan out to the migrant camps to offer Mass, prayer services, bible study, and sacramental preparation. The diocese also provides emergency assistance and social service referrals and helps workers understand their rights.

“The migrant ministry gives people a sense of belonging and addresses the needs of the entire person,” Veronica says. It also provides condensed, flexible sacramental catechesis. First Holy Communion and Confirmation preparation are offered to children whose parents are generally not in one location long enough to complete a traditional course of study. “If we don’t catch them now, they might not be back at all—or until they ask for marriage,” she says. The diocese also provides bilingual books to help parents continue their children’s training in the faith.

“The migrants are rich in spirituality, and we learn a lot from them. It’s a



Sisters from the Congregation of Missionary Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit host activities for families in migrant camps.

beautiful community that has brought us many gifts, including a concentration on the family,” says Fanny Tabares, director of migrant ministry.

The ministry is challenged by the poor conditions endured by many of the people it serves, says Veronica. Some of the seasonal workers are lured with false promises and are subjected to abuse, including human trafficking. “Some of the laws do not favor the migrants, and minimum wage, for example, won’t work the same way for migrants as for other workers,” she says.

Bishop Paul J. Bradley confirms youths and adults each summer and conducts Masses at migrant camps. “Without Catholic Home Missions’ help, our ability to carry out our mission to proclaim the Gospel in all its many aspects would be much more limited,” he says.

Dioceses across the country, like Knoxville, Jackson, and Kalamazoo, are enriched by a vibrant, growing Hispanic population. As this population grows, Catholic Home Missions grants provide the opportunity to expand training and enhance pastoral programs welcoming these faith-filled people into the family of the Church.



Bishop Bradley blesses families at Mass held for migrants in his Diocese of Kalamazoo.



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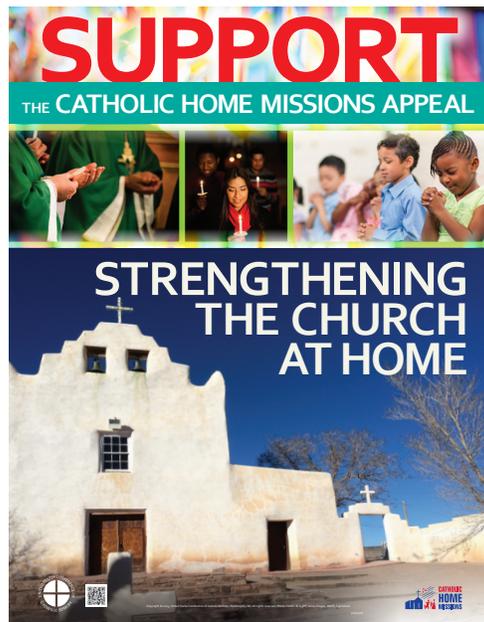
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READ ABOUT HOW THE
Dioceses of Knoxville, Jackson,
and Kalamazoo find creative
ways to support their growing
Hispanic populations.



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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