



**CATHOLIC  
HOME  
MISSIONS**

## Bishop Sees Positive Impact of Catholic Home Missions Grants in Puerto Rico

Left: Capilla Medalla Milagrosa, Diocese of Ponce, Puerto Rico.

Right: Bishop Alberto Arturo Figueroa Morales of the Diocese of Arecibo, Puerto Rico, and Bishop Daniel Mueggengborg of the USCCB's Subcommittee on Home Missions share a visit in Arecibo.



By Rhina Guidos

**B**ishop Daniel Mueggengborg of the Diocese of Reno visited Appalachia as a missionary when he was a young man in the 1970s. The visit opened his eyes to the good the Church's outreach could do.

"When I was a student in college at Oklahoma State University, I made several trips with Glenmary Home Missioners to do service weeks and mission trips in Appalachia," he said. "It was really the experience of those mission trips with Glenmary that helped me see firsthand the extent of poverty within our own country and the need for the Church's outreach, both on a social level in terms of social justice, but also in terms of bringing the richness of the Catholic faith to these remote parts of these underevangelized parts of our country."

These days, as a bishop on the Subcommittee on Catholic Home Missions, he had a similar experience, albeit on a different scale, during a February 2024 trip to Puerto Rico. There he witnessed the churches and other properties damaged by recent earthquakes, hurricanes, and tropical storms. Speaking with local church members and fellow bishops, he learned about the challenges the island faces and how the kindness of others has helped the Church survive it all.

"The Church in Puerto Rico is strong despite having suffered so many challenges in recent years," he said. "The joy and warm welcome of the people left a lasting impression on me and signified the depth of their faith in the midst of ongoing adversity. It was eye-opening for me to see the continuing need for rebuilding following earthquakes and hurricanes."

*...continued on page 2*

# Neighbors

ISSUE 3 2024

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

# FROM THE CHAIRMAN

...continued from page 1



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The work of Catholic Home Missions is an ongoing expression of solidarity with our brothers and sisters in dioceses across the United States and its territories that require

outside financial support to meet the expenses of ministering to the populations they serve. This solidarity is seen not only through crucial financial support, but also through the personal encounters that bring together Catholics from mission and non-mission dioceses alike.

This issue describes the recent encounter between my brother Bishop Daniel Mueggenborg and the laity and clergy of Puerto Rico, where Catholic Home Missions supports ministries in each of the island's six dioceses. As a member of the Subcommittee on Catholic Home Missions, Bishop Mueggenborg understands this mission of solidarity and encounter, and he had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the strong faith and hope found in the Church in Puerto Rico. Despite many hardships caused by two hurricanes and an earthquake that resulted in widespread destruction and damage, the Church in Puerto Rico is a sign of joy and resilience.

Through your devoted support of Catholic Home Missions, you join in this mission and make a positive impact in the lives of Catholics in Puerto Rico and nearly 70 other dioceses in the United States and its territories. With gratitude for your ongoing commitment to Catholic Home Missions, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend W. Shawn McKnight  
Bishop of Jefferson City  
Chairman, USCCB Subcommittee on  
Catholic Home Missions

The island was battered by two powerful back-to-back hurricanes in 2017 that destroyed much of its infrastructure, tearing roofs, flooding churches, collapsing chapels, and destroying the island's electrical grid. The island also deals with persistent earthquakes, including one in January 2022 that caused an estimated \$110 million in damages.

In Puerto Rico's capital of San Juan, Bishop Mueggenborg met with Archbishop Roberto González Nieves to learn more about the difficult decisions the Church in Puerto Rico faces as it tries to rebuild the infrastructure of parishes, schools, and charitable ministries.

"He is filled with hope and confidence in the face of these challenges—a true expression of his apostolic heart for the poor and suffering," Bishop Mueggenborg said. "Archbishop Nieves expressed his profound gratitude to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops for their support at this critical time. The support from the US conference is a true sign of our solidarity with the Church in Puerto Rico."

In Ponce, he met with Bishop Ruben Antonio González Medina. The earthquake had destroyed several of the Ponce diocese's parishes and schools.

"Thanks to the emergency funding from the US bishops' Catholic Home Missions Appeal and the Bishops Emergency Disaster Fund, he is able to continue educational and parochial ministries," Bishop Mueggenborg said. "Bishop Medina is a fatherly bishop whose care for his flock was evident in the way he greeted us and celebrated Mass with us. He has worked tirelessly for decades serving the people of Puerto Rico and he has a sincere respect for his priests as his co-workers in meeting the vast needs

of sacramental, catechetical, and charitable ministries."

Though a few years have passed since the hurricanes and the earthquake struck the island, which is a US territory, help from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was slow from the start. Government reports acknowledged that the response was inadequate and that reconstruction work has been delayed as a result. Bishop Mueggenborg witnessed the effects of these delays firsthand during his visit to Puerto Rico's dioceses.

"It was eye-opening for me to see the continuing need for rebuilding following earthquakes and hurricanes," Bishop Mueggenborg said. "It is also disappointing and frustrating to see how long it has taken FEMA to provide practical assistance to communities that need to rebuild. This site visit reaffirmed how critical it is for all US Catholics to assist our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico."

Bishop Mueggenborg also paid a visit to Bishop Alberto Arturo Figueroa Morales of the Diocese of Arecibo, on the island's northern coast.

"Bishop Morales has faced so many challenges in such a short time," Bishop Mueggenborg said. "In addition to the hurricanes and earthquake, he also had a devastating fire strike his cathedral, San Felipe Apóstol."

Yet amid tragedy, "great and beautiful works are taking place," he said, mentioning an orphanage in the diocese "that cares for so many abandoned and neglected children."

"Bishop Morales has a pastor's heart and radiates joy and love in the midst of these overwhelming challenges," he said. He added that his Areciban counterpart was touched by funding received from Catholic Home Missions, especially "our care

**Left: Bishop Mueggenborg, Manuel Martinez, and Tom Gordon of the Catholic Extension Society discuss our collaborative efforts to assist the Church in Puerto Rico to rebuild following earthquakes and hurricanes.**

**Right: Extensive smoke damage caused by an isolated fire closed the Catedral San Felipe Apóstol requiring expensive remediation of toxic soot.**

and concern for him and his people as well as our desire to walk with him as he rebuilds his diocese and restores his cathedral.”

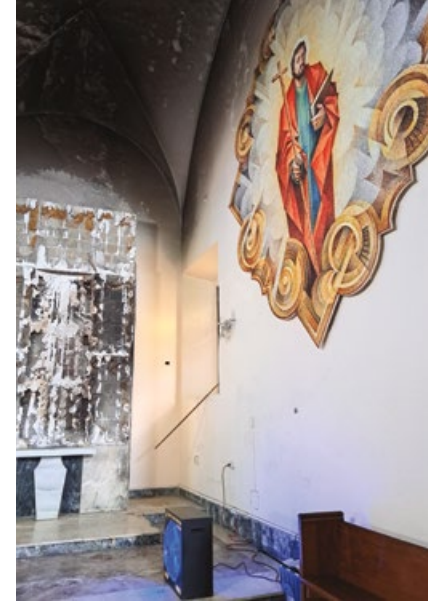
Bishop Mueggenborg’s zeal for the work of Catholic Home Missions “runs pretty deeply,” he admits.

While most people would struggle to see the similarities between the lush landscapes of Puerto Rico and the mountain landscapes of Appalachia, where Bishop Mueggenborg served as a young missionary, the two regions and their peoples have much in common. Consider the Church’s need for solidarity, accompaniment, and financial help to provide basic ministry to the populations of both regions, whether they face natural disasters or the economic hardships that often affect rural areas. Catholic Home Missions helps them fund catechesis, seminarian education, lay ministry training, and Hispanic ministry, among other pastoral programs.

“First of all, I come from a mission diocese, Tulsa, Oklahoma. And so, all the time that I was growing up, I was very much aware . . . that that area of the country is very much a mission diocese,” he said. “What’s different now is that I realize the complexity of the challenges that we face in actually carrying out these ministries. I also realize how much we need resources in terms of priests who have a passion for evangelization, mission and outreach.”

Bishop Mueggenborg said that one of the goals of his visit was to see the “impressive” collaboration taking place between Catholic Home Missions and the Chicago-based Catholic Extension Society, which partially sponsored his visit. Catholic Extension Society shares with Catholic Home Missions the purpose of helping poor and remote Catholic communities to carry out lives of faith. The society has greatly helped the Church in Puerto Rico after its natural disasters by taking a lead role in collaborating with the local churches as they work with FEMA.

“This collaboration brings together not only additional funding but also greater expertise and consultation to assist the Church in



Puerto Rico to move forward in the best strategic way,” Bishop Mueggenborg said. “This is really a decisive moment for the Church in Puerto Rico to rebuild for the future, not the past. In doing so, Catholic Home Missions and Catholic Extension Society are in conversation with the bishops of Puerto Rico so they can learn and benefit from us, and we can learn from them.”

Both agencies bring expertise and resources from church members and together can “really accomplish so much more in helping the local church and the people of Puerto Rico,” he said. “And so, seeing that collaborative relationship, I thought was a very beautiful sign of the communion of the Catholic Church and of how diverse ministries can and do cooperate in ways that often times we don’t see. I was very privileged to witness that firsthand.”

Catholics can help by becoming more aware of the hardships experienced by church members in remote locations.

**“Awareness of the missions is necessary for anyone who wants to be a mature disciple.”**

“I think in many ways, our practice of Christian charity is perfected when we are charitable towards those whom we have never met, and we’re doing so simply because they are loved by Christ, and Christ wants us to be the instrument of his love for them,” he said. “That’s really a perfection of charity within the Church. So I think that that awareness of the missions is necessary for anyone who wants to be a mature disciple.”

And in places like Puerto Rico, the need to keep the Church alive is urgent. Because of the hardships on the island, some 130,000 Puerto Ricans left for the mainland United States following the hurricanes. That migration, along with the damage to chapels and churches, greatly affected Mass attendance as well as potential vocations.

**“Solidarity is manifested by our communion of prayer and by being aware of their needs and praying with them and for them. . . . Solidarity is expressed by presence.”**

“The Church there has been really facing challenges for well over a century in terms of forces that have tried to diminish or eradicate the Catholic presence. And yet the Church has remained strong in the face of all that,” Bishop Mueggenborg said.

But solidarity has helped keep the faith alive, even in hardship.

“Solidarity is manifested by our communion of prayer and by being aware of their needs and praying with them and for them,” Bishop Mueggenborg said. “Secondly, solidarity is expressed by presence. The mere fact that people let them know, let the people of Puerto Rico know that they are not forgotten, that they are cared for, and that there are people who are concerned about them, that’s very encouraging for anyone who’s facing such a difficult challenge. Certainly, our ability to assist them with resources is a clear manifestation of our practical charity.”



*Strengthening the Church at Home*

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON CATHOLIC HOME MISSIONS**

Office of National Collections  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
3211 Fourth Street NE  
Washington, DC 20017-1194

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Permit No. 61  
Hyattsville, MD

**ISSUE 3 2024**

# IN THIS ISSUE



## SUBCOMMITTEE ON CATHOLIC HOME MISSIONS

**Chairman**  
Most Rev. W. Shawn McKnight

**Members**  
Most Rev. Bohdan J. Danylo  
Most Rev. Daniel Mueggenborg  
Most Rev. Steven J. Raica  
Most Rev. James Tamayo  
Most Rev. Anthony Taylor  
Most Rev. Michael Warfel  
Most Rev. Chad Zielinski

**Staff**  
Mary Mencarini Campbell  
Kevin Day  
Kenneth Q. Ong  
Mariya Lupiy

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

### DID YOU KNOW?

- The work of Catholic Home Missions extends beyond the continental United States to its territories, including Puerto Rico.
- Catholic Home Missions supports essential pastoral ministries in each of Puerto Rico's six dioceses: the Archdiocese of San Juan, as well as the dioceses of Arecibo, Caguas, Fajardo-Humacao, Mayagüez, and Ponce.
- The Church in Puerto Rico serves a Catholic population of nearly 2 million people, but economic hardship caused by natural disasters and outward migration to the mainland United States has affected Mass attendance and vocations. Support from Catholic Home Missions helps the Church in Puerto Rico remain strong.

Our work is supported by the annual collection taken up by US dioceses in their parishes. 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. iGiveCatholicTogether also accepts contributions to support the Catholic Home Missions program: [usccb.givecatholictogether.org/organizations/usccb-catholic-home-missions](http://usccb.givecatholictogether.org/organizations/usccb-catholic-home-missions).

Copyright © 2024, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. All rights reserved. All photos by Kevin Day (USCCB staff) (pp. 1, 3).

