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FALL 2008

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

YOUTH MINISTRY CELEBRATES DIVERSE CULTURES OF YAKIMA

“We are one community and one body, but each part of our body has a different need.”

This is how Elizabeth Torrès sums up the bilingual, multicultural youth and young adult ministry she directs for the Diocese of Yakima.

Yakima’s Catholic population includes a Hispanic majority from Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala; an Anglo community; and smaller Native American and Filipino groups.

“The earlier we start working with youth, the easier it is to keep them in our faith,” Elizabeth says. “You learn your faith in your main language, and little things make a big difference. Even if [all of the youths] speak English and go to school together, they live their faith differently. It’s hard to translate some concepts. That’s why we do our ministry in both languages, because it’s important to reach out.”

“Sometimes language is a barrier,” she says, but offering bilingual services “enriches our ministry and the way we do outreach.”

Yakima Bishop Carlos A. Sevilla, SJ, agrees, saying, “Because we’ve had the

good fortune of having talented bilingual, bicultural applicants for youth ministry, the impact of the ministry has increased significantly, despite the fact that the majority of our parishes are not able to employ a youth minister.”

The leadership training in the youth ministry program motivates teens to continue to improve themselves and to go to college. Few students in the diocese, especially in the Hispanic community, enroll in college directly after high school. For example, Elizabeth tells of a youth leader in East Wenatchee who left high school to help support her family. With the encouragement of the youth ministry, that leader earned her General Equivalency Diploma and graduated from college with a nursing degree.

Elizabeth joined the Yakima youth program in 1990 as a teenager and became director of Hispanic youth ministry in 2004. Two years later, she was named to lead the office that coordinates youth and young adult services to English- and Spanish-speaking groups. Now she is

also part of the national leadership team for several groups of Hispanic pastoral ministers, and she notes that the Yakima Hispanic youth ministry program is used as a model for other dioceses in the country.

In her daily work, Elizabeth acts as a resource for existing parish youth ministers. She conducts one-day retreats and regional gatherings of youth leaders several times a year, and she supports the efforts of the parish youth ministers.

“I’d like to offer more formation programs,” she says, “but the lack of money is a barrier.”

Elizabeth is actively targeting programs to youth in parishes where there is no youth group. “About 50% of the parishes have a youth ministry program,” she says. “I try to offer programs to motivate the other parishes to start. It’s hard to get them to hire someone [as a youth minister], but it’s also hard to get someone to do it as a volunteer.”

FROM THE CHAIRMAN FALL 2008



DEAR FRIENDS,

From the Cascades to the banks of the Columbia River to the rich agricultural fields of the Yakima Valley, the Catholic Church in central Washington is working to form young people into committed disciples. Sadly, too many youth in central Washington either have joined street gangs or are at risk of doing so. These young people are searching for a sense of family and identity in a society they feel does not accept them.

Too often, adolescents across our country are neglected. Too often, our nation's youth are not provided with the educational, recreational, and employment opportunities to move safely and successfully into adulthood. Far too many are struggling to construct their lives without an adequate foundation.

The Catholic community in the Diocese of Yakima has stepped up to this pastoral challenge with considerable creativity, energy, and resources. With a more comprehensive and community-wide approach to adolescent ministry, this 18,000-square-mile mission diocese is investing in its young people.

The Church must become the traveling companion of adolescents. It takes an entire Church to journey with young men and women as they heed the Good News of Jesus and respond in joyful discipleship. To help dioceses meet this challenge, Catholic Home Missions has granted over \$3.3 million to dioceses over the past 10 years to support youth ministry programs.

In this central Washington mission diocese, the Catholic community welcomes its young people, values their participation, calls forth their God-given gifts, and integrates their youthful vision and energy into the liturgical, pastoral, and ministerial life of the diocesan and parish family. It has proved to be a very wise investment.

On behalf of our Catholics in Mission America,
we thank you!

Most Rev. Michael W. Warfel
Bishop of Great Falls-Billings
Chairman, USCCB Subcommittee
on Catholic Home Missions

The **USCCB Committee on National Collections**, through its **Subcommittee on Catholic Home Missions**, provides financial support for missionary activities that strengthen and extend the presence of the Church in the United States and its island territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific.



The Diocese of Yakima covers 18,000 square miles in central Washington state. Catholicism was established in the area in 1847 by French Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Pope Pius XII created the diocese in 1951.

Catholics compose 14% of the total population of the diocese. About 20,000 families are served by 51 active diocesan priests and 6 priests from religious orders. The average age of all the priests is 54. Eight of the 41 parishes of the diocese share a pastor with another parish.

One pastor, for example, covers three parishes separated from one another by drives ranging from 45 to 80 minutes. He celebrates three weekend Masses (English, Spanish, and bilingual) at one parish, drives to the second for a Sunday night liturgy in Spanish, and then hears confessions and celebrates Mass there again on Thursday. In summer, he celebrates a Sunday night Mass once a month in the third parish, located in a remote farming community.

One priest was ordained in Yakima in 2008, and 13 men are studying at the seminary. At least one current seminarian came through Yakima's youth ministry program.

The Yakima diocese embraces parishioners of many different cultural heritages. More than 60% of its people are Hispanic, and most parishes offer Masses, religious instruction, faith formation, justice education, and pro-life action in both Spanish and English. Five parishes are located within the reservation of the Yakama Nation. There are also significant numbers of people of Filipino, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Croatian descent.

Unemployment rates are generally high in Yakima, and they rose steadily through the first seven months of 2008. Agriculture is Yakima's dominant industry. Mass attendance and reception of the sacraments decline during the harvest season, because many parishioners must work on Sundays to support their families.

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Currently, the Hispanic youth ministry in the diocese is quite active and draws greater participation than the other youth ministry group, she says. The two groups have distinct leadership councils, meetings, and events. Elizabeth acknowledges that it is sometimes difficult for the youth to adapt to one another's cultural preferences. But eventually, she would like to establish a common youth council with representatives of both groups.

Already, there are occasions where the groups participate together, most notably the annual youth convention, a bilingual gathering for high school students. The convention features keynote speeches and contemporary entertainment in both languages. The organizing team includes representatives of both groups.

About 300 students are expected to attend this year's November convention. The convention workshops will focus on the theme "Here I Am/Aquí Estoy," based on Isaiah 6:8. The convention will highlight healthy relationships and the theology of the body.



"One of the ways to say 'yes' to the Lord is to learn to have a healthy relationship with people and God," says

Elizabeth. "We want to involve youth with one another and help them establish a relationship with God."

Elizabeth hails Bishop Sevilla's enthusiastic support of the youth ministry program and notes that he spends the convention weekend with the youth.

"Celebrating the sacraments, especially Reconciliation, helps the bishop get to know the youth. He's a very engaging speaker and very visual in his images. The youth really like him," she says.

The sentiment is mutual. Bishop Sevilla says, "It's impossible not to be energized and encouraged by participating in the youth convention, with so many young people who love God and try to give him a more important place in their lives as they face the challenges of our society and culture."

"Our mission is to empower Catholic young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ through a responsible participation in the life, mission, and work of the Church, to promote personal and spiritual growth for our young people, and to provide leadership and vision for youth ministry in the Diocese of Yakima."

—Mission Statement, Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Diocese of Yakima

YOUTH GROUPS RAISE LEADERS

When Angelica Hernandez joined the youth program at St. Paul Cathedral Parish in Yakima, she was a shy 14-year-old whose knees shook when she stood in front of a group. Now, at 24, she laughs, saying, "I might get nervous, but I don't show it. A lot of things changed."

The youth group helped develop Angelica's leadership skills. More importantly, it grounded her in her Catholic faith.

"It helped me grow as a person and as a Christian," she says. "I learned so much about my faith and about the importance of Mass and the sacraments. The more you know, the more you want to learn and to teach other people."

Angelica became a leader in her parish youth group and continued to help out during her college years. She recently

finished teaching a four-month leadership course for the diocese.

Angelica met her husband at the youth group. They dated for four years before marrying two years ago. He hopes to help their new parish restart its youth group. Meanwhile, Angelica has her sights set on establishing a young adult ministry for parishioners who are over 18.

Karina Jiminez followed her big sister to the youth group at San Juan Diego Parish in Cowiche, a small town northwest of Yakima.

"I wanted to be like her," Karina says.

Karina, 17, is now one of three youth leaders of a group that regularly attracts 15 to 20 teens. The activities include a combination of worship, discussion, and outings to arcades and parks, as well as



attendance at the diocesan youth retreat each year.

Karina's primarily Hispanic group also helps elderly Anglo neighbors with small projects.

Karina says that the Friday night meetings help strengthen her faith. She also got a huge boost from participating in the 2007 National Catholic Youth Conference in Columbus, Ohio. "Seeing so many youths there, 20,000 people, was incredible," she says.



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Continue your discovery of the Catholic home missions with a focus on the Diocese of Yakima and its youth ministry program. This mission diocese in central Washington state is stepping up to the challenges of reaching out to young Catholics. Catholic Home Missions has granted \$940,270 to the diocese for many essential pastoral programs. See inside for how that's making a difference to the youth of the diocese.

For more information on the home missions across the United States, explore our Web site at www.usccb.org/hm.

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