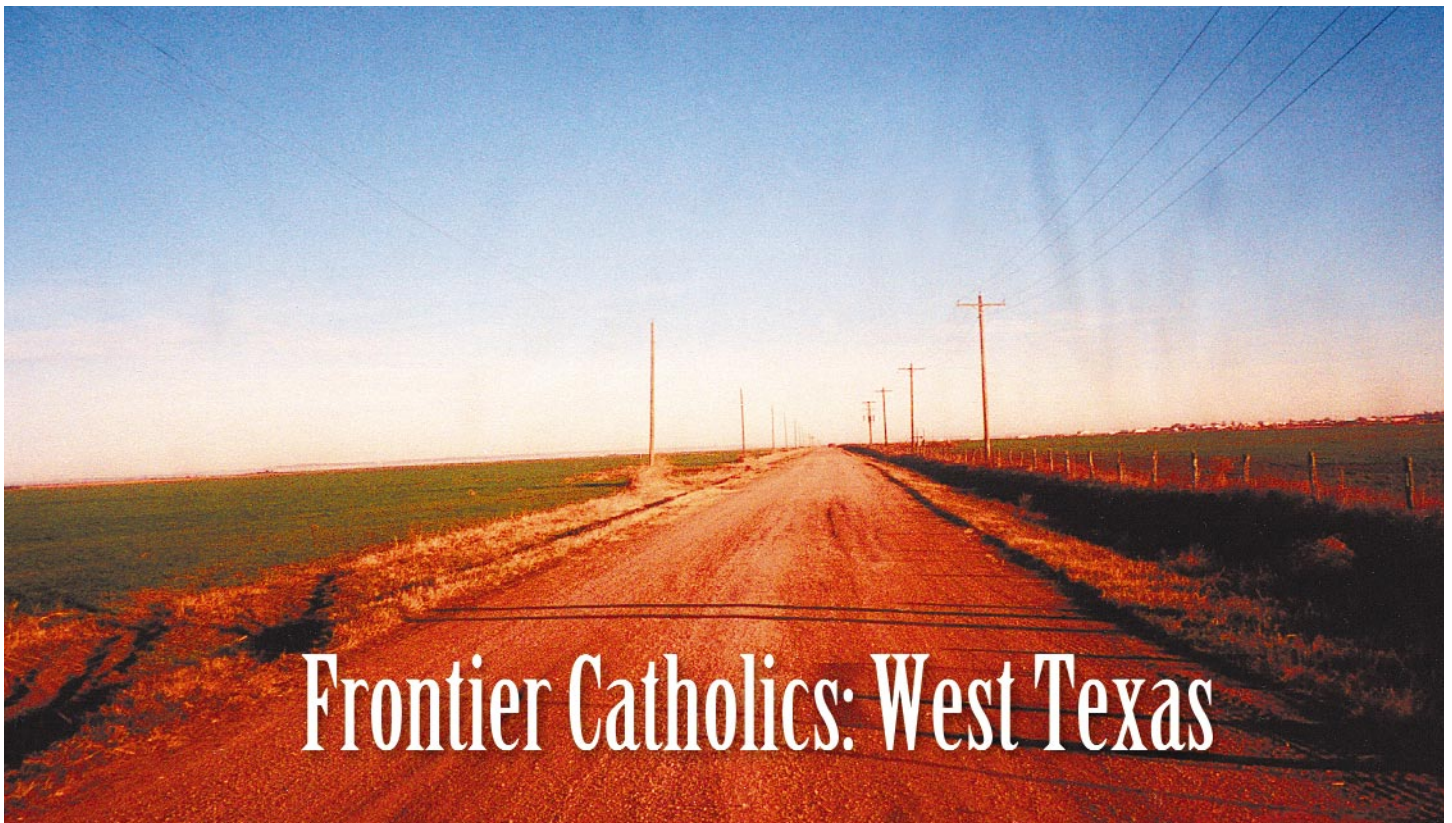


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SPRING 2003

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA



Frontier Catholics: West Texas

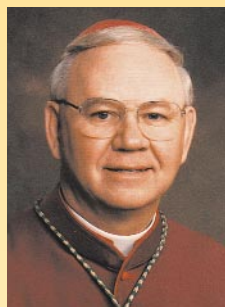
The dusty panhandle of West Texas is mission country in which travel is difficult in any weather. It is dotted with wheat, cotton fields, and grazing cattle; the occasional tumbleweed tears across the windswept plains. Without trees or other natural barriers, the wind is brutal and the few existing trees grow sideways. Winters are harsh and hazardous due to ice storms and unpredictable snow drifts.

Inhabitants of the small towns—scattered throughout stretches of dry land, with its scrub, brush, and cacti—work hard to scratch out a living in this barren land. Cattle, oil, peanuts, and cotton are the major industries, employing the largest number of people mostly at minimum wage. The prevailing culture is one of simplicity bordering on poverty.

Being Catholic here is no easy task, for West Texas is a Catholic frontier.

Catholics are a minority in this Bible Belt. With the rapid growth of the Hispanic community, Hispanic Catholics especially are targeted for proselytism by other Christian denominations. Hispanics now account for a significant proportion of local Catholic parishes in West Texas—and many of these families must travel 30 miles or more each way to attend Mass and receive the sacraments. They do so because Catholicism is a way of life for them.

From The Chairman



Dear Friends,

When someone mentions "Texas," Dallas or Houston usually comes to mind. But the western part of this vast state, the Panhandle, is another world entirely. It is hard-edged, rocky, and dramatic—a place closer in spirit to the Alamo than the gleaming towers of those two large cities.

The staff of the Secretariat for Home Missions travels constantly to out-of-the-way missions to meet the priests, sisters, and laity who serve there, assess needs, and ensure that the dollars contributed to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal are well and wisely spent. Sometimes they come home with remarkable stories.

The territory around the city of Lubbock has a split personality. The mesa tops, called "cap rock," are flat as a lake at sunset. Farmers grow cotton here; and the summer fields undulate in white waves all the way to the horizon. Driving down off the cap rock, however, one descends about 1,500 feet, and in a mile or so the land turns ugly—broken, gashed by eroded gulches, and ragged with mesquite and buffalo grass. It provides little use for people or cattle, and it isn't even pleasant to look at unless the cactus is blooming in bright yellow flowers. The brown, dull, windblown towns with their tired buildings squat under the sky as timeless as Stonehenge.

A few years ago, the people of San Jose Parish in Crosbyton needed a parish hall. They could not afford one, of course, but that was just an inconvenience. The surrounding countryside was dotted with one-room settlers' cabins, long abandoned except by rattlesnakes. The parishioners collected four pickup trucks and gathered at one of these houses. They tied up the trucks in pairs back-to-back, jacked up the cabin, balanced it on the truck beds, put the two rearward-facing trucks in neutral and carefully drove the whole assemblage into town. Two more trips and they had the raw material they needed. Volunteers knocked out the end walls of three cabins and joined them together. The result: one U-shaped parish hall for CCD classes and parish celebrations!

While the people of Crosbyton certainly displayed uncommon initiative, Catholics in mission areas often have to make do with very limited money and personnel. The Secretariat for Home Missions is proud to help them fulfill their dreams.

† Most Rev. Paul A. Zipfel
Bishop of Bismarck
Chairman
Secretariat for Home Missions

On January 1, 2003, we became the **Secretariat for Home Missions**. We will continue to provide financial support for U.S. mission dioceses, advocate for their unique pastoral needs, and educate Catholics concerning mission at home.



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DID YOU KNOW?



MAJOR CONCERNS OF RURAL PARISHES

Shortage of priests: With fewer priests, rural parishes are often the first to be merged or consolidated. As a result, such churches often lose their "local identity" as Catholic communities.

Sacramental challenges: Because the Eucharist is available only once or twice a month, people in rural areas have the opportunity to attend Mass less often than in the past.

Finances: In rural areas, the Catholic population is very much a minority. Providing an adequate and just salary for lay ministers can be a real challenge for small parishes.

Access to diocesan services: Rural pastoral leaders usually have to travel for hours to attend meetings. As a result, lay formation programs are rarely offered in rural areas.

Credit: Glenmary Department of Pastoral Services, Nashville, TN

Remember the Missions

Your request to support the work of the Secretariat for Home Missions may be made as follows:

To the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, for the exclusive purpose of assisting Roman Catholic home mission dioceses in the United States.

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In the midst of these geographical and cultural challenges, both the Dioceses of Amarillo and Lubbock have long struggled with a serious shortage of personnel and financial resources. In Amarillo, Bishop John Yanta faces the daunting task of ministering to 48 parishes and missions with only 24 active diocesan priests and 8 religious order priests, one-third of whom will become eligible for retirement over the next five years. Already, nearly 90 percent of the mission parishes lack a full-time priest. However, due to zealous recruitment efforts, seven men are currently studying for the priesthood, and twenty are in vocation discernment.

To the south, Bishop Placido Rodriguez of the Lubbock diocese must minister to 63 parishes and missions with only 26 active diocesan priests, 7 religious order priests, and 7 priests from other dioceses. However, the diocese now has 14 seminarians—7 of them from Mexico—who bring hope to the future and to the priests who bear the burden of serving these missions.

Providing adequate religious education and evangelization ministries continues to be challenging tasks in both dioceses, for most parishes and missions are extremely poor. In Amarillo, as many as 45 percent of the students qualify for the Federal Free/Reduced Lunch Program. In Lubbock, 21 of the 25 counties fall far below the national poverty average. A large percentage of people are employed as farm workers. Their low

wages simply cannot provide sufficient funding for diocesan programs.

Yet these dioceses are rich in faith. In August 2002, Amarillo sponsored a Eucharistic Congress that drew 6,000 people—remarkable considering that the total Catholic population is under 50,000. Later that year, Lubbock demonstrated its ties to the universal Church by exhibiting medieval frescoes from the Vatican Museum for the edification of Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The Holy Spirit is blowing in that Texas wing. ■



Parents of Catholic school students work long hours in the fields and on the ranches to provide a faith-based education for their children.

Strengthening the Church at Home **Catholic Home Missions Appeal** **April 27, 2003**

Scheduled nationally for April 27, 2003, the Catholic Home Missions Appeal (CHMA) provides a wonderful opportunity for Catholics in our own country to help one another.

Catholics in the home mission dioceses—Alaska, Appalachia, the deep South, the Southwest, the Mountain West, and the young dioceses of the Caribbean and the Pacific—face major challenges in living their faith. They struggle with fewer priests and Catholic institutions, difficult travel conditions, poor economic environments, and limited financial resources. They often constitute a small minority within a larger population. Their pastoral and financial needs are multiple.

Here at home, 85 dioceses—including the Eastern Catholic Churches—simply are unable to provide the most basic pastoral ministries for their people without support from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Home Missions.

CHMA enables Catholic parishes in poor communities to keep their doors open and to provide Mass, sacraments, and religious education for their people.

Give generously to the 2003 Catholic Home Missions Appeal. Support the Church at home.



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• SECRETARIAT FOR HOME MISSIONS • **Who Are We?**

The bishops' Secretariat for Home Missions was founded as the American Board of Catholic Missions in 1924. In cooperation with the Black and Indian Missions Board (1885) and the Catholic Church Extension Society (1905), the Secretariat 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 principal beneficiaries of the annual Catholic Home Missions Appeal

are approximately 85 home mission dioceses, which include the Eastern Catholic Church eparchies.

Bishop Paul A. Zipfel, *Chairman*
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Want to See More?

We invite you to take an Internet journey to a few of our home missions and learn what's happening in their part of the country. Just log on to www.usccb.org/hm and click on **Stories and Pictures from the Field**.