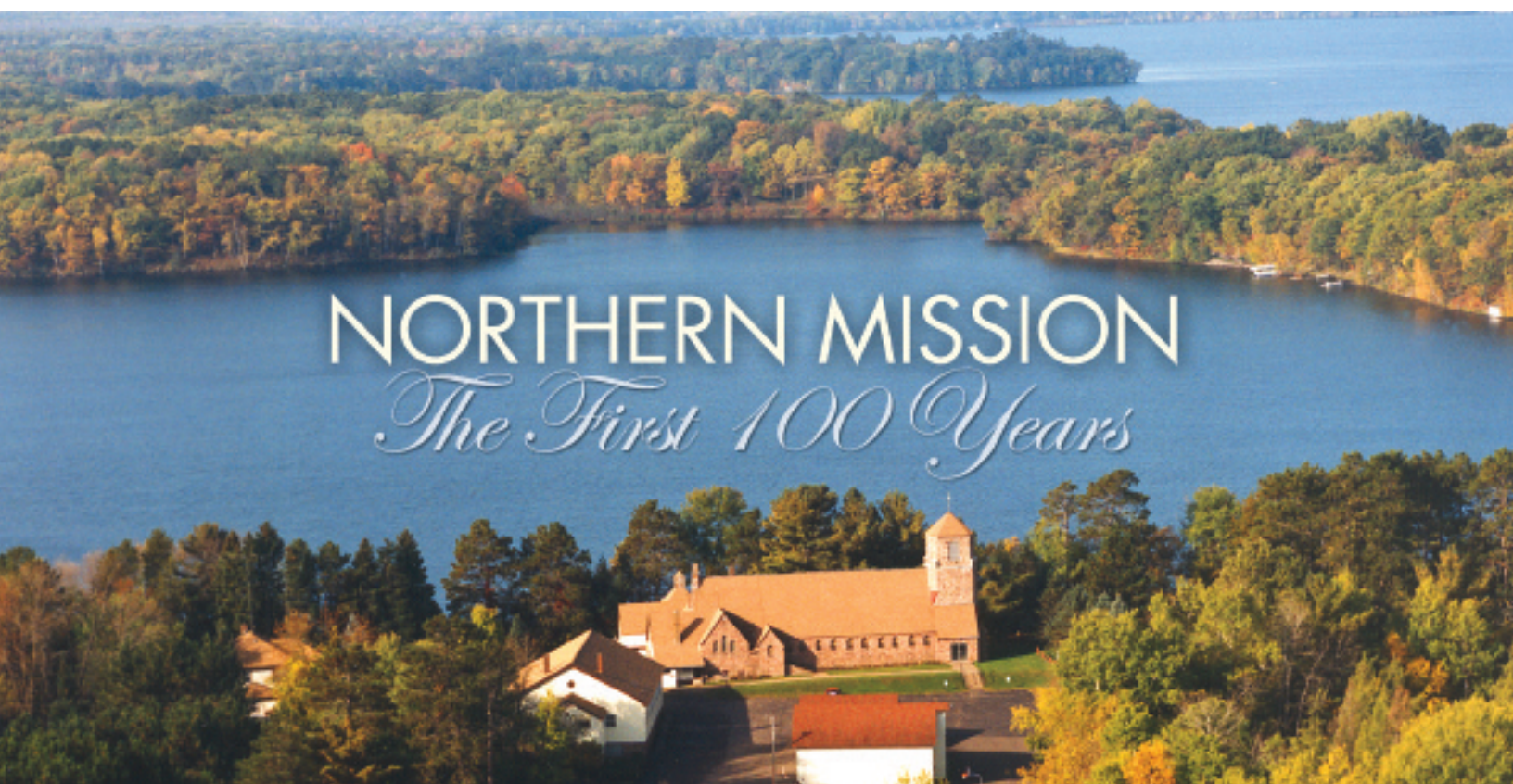




neighbors

WINTER 2005

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA



NORTHERN MISSION *The First 100 Years*

“**W**e are entering a period of new vitality for the church, a period in which adult Catholic laity will play a pivotal leadership role in fulfilling the Christian mission of evangelizing and transforming society.”

So wrote the bishops of the United States in their 1999 pastoral plan for

adult faith formation, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*.

Today in northern Wisconsin, generous lay women and men are responding to the bishops' call. At the western end of the Great Lakes just a short hop from Canada, the 15,715-square-mile Diocese of Superior, Wisconsin has only 52 priests to serve its 110 parishes. It depends heavily on well-trained lay people to keep parish life vigorous.

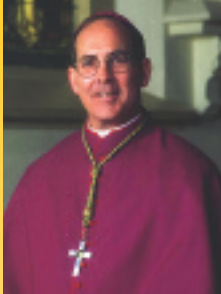
Bishop Raphael Fliss, faced with a shortage of clergy and a growing Catholic population, has been forced to cluster most of Superior's parishes into groups of three or four.

Circuit-rider priests drive hundreds of miles each weekend to celebrate Mass and the sacraments for these cluster groups.

Deacons and skilled lay people provide the day-to-day leadership,

From The Chairman

Winter 2005



Dear Friends,

I am writing this as Thanksgiving approaches. High on my list of things to thank God for are our faithful donors. Your prayers and contributions enable the Committee on the Home Missions to support and spread our Catholic faith here in America. Your gifts are truly appreciated.

The feature article in this issue highlights the Diocese of Superior and its determined efforts to provide trained personnel for its parishes and missions. We do not usually think of Wisconsin as

Catholic mission territory. However, the growing shortage of priests is straining dioceses across the country, forcing them to devote scarce resources to training deacons, sisters, and lay people for parish service. Local churches that did not need outside help a few years ago need it now.

According to the 2004 *Official Catholic Directory*, the United States currently has 28,967 priests, 8,302 of whom are retired or ill. That leaves 20,665 in active service. One-sixth of all parishes (16.5%) lack resident pastors. Most of these leaderless parishes are under the pastoral care of the pastor of a neighboring parish. In the Diocese of Superior, for example, a priest offers the Mass and sacraments in all the parishes in his cluster, while full-time or part-time administrators provide much of the day-to-day leadership in each individual church.

Across the country, deacons run 144 parishes, sisters run 240, and lay people administer 149. At a recent Home Missions Conference in Nashville, Bishop Joseph Latino, who heads the Diocese of Jackson, Mississippi and serves on our committee, reported that 21 of his parishes have no resident priest. About half are administered by someone other than a priest, and there is no Sunday Mass at 10 of them. Here in Arkansas, deacons lead two missions, and women religious lead two; nearly 50 of our approximately 125 parishes and missions are without a resident priest.

We might find it easy to feel gloomy over the shrinking number of priests, especially in mission dioceses, where distances are typically great and priests must say Mass at several parishes each weekend. For example, there are only 45 priests in the whole state of Wyoming, which covers 100,000 square miles, so Father is on the road a lot!

Yet many mission dioceses are experiencing growth in the number of seminarians, and the current shortage offers wonderful apostolic opportunities to the Catholic faithful. As the feature article shows, deacons, sisters and lay people are “stepping up” to receive the training necessary to qualify them for parish work. Since the number of sisters is declining even faster than priests, deacons and lay people will increasingly be heading parishes in rural America—and perhaps in urban America as well.

Over the years, the Committee on the Home Missions has put more and more money into training people for ministry. The Church in Mission Territory USA needs their services to thrive. I encourage your contributions to the Catholic Home Missions Appeal. These contributions help parishes remain open that might otherwise close if there were no one to care for them.

† Most Rev. J. Peter Sartain
Bishop of Little Rock
Chairman, Committee on the Home Missions

DID YOU KNOW?



Diocese of Superior, Wisconsin

Wisconsin, “America’s Dairyland,” is one of the top producers of milk, cheese, and butter in the nation.

Wisconsin’s rivers and streams, placed end to end, would stretch more than 26,000 miles, all the way around the world.

As the largest Great Lake, Lake Superior is 350 miles in length, 160 miles in width, and over 1400 feet deep. Thirty to forty million tons of cargo are shipped each season through the twin ports of Duluth and Superior.

In the 15,715-square-mile Diocese of Superior, Wisconsin, the northernmost parish in Hurley is 105 miles from the pastoral center in Superior. The southernmost parish in Merrill is 210 miles away.

About 20 percent of the people in the Diocese of Superior’s 16 counties are Catholic. Nearly all—96%—are Caucasian.

Remember the Missions

Donations are very much appreciated. Checks may be made to: *Committee on the Home Missions (CHM)*

Please consider support for the work of the Committee on the Home Missions in your estate planning. Bequests may be made 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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sacramental preparation, pastoral counseling, and other services necessary to a vital parish community.

Working in close collaboration with priests, 31 full-time lay people, two brothers, and nine religious sisters now minister in the larger parishes of Superior. Due to lack of funds, unfortunately, smaller rural parishes spread across 16 counties must sometimes depend on part-time paid staff or the generosity of lay volunteers.

With endless enthusiasm, more than 1,200 lay catechists from all over northern Wisconsin offer religious education for youth and adults in the 30 parish clusters. However, only about 200 of the instructors have earned the proper certification since it became available in 1993. The Diocese of Superior has now launched a campaign to certify all teachers.

“Any successful religious education programs in our parishes depend on well-trained and spiritually alive lay catechists,” said Mr. Richard Lyons, diocesan director of Christian formation.

Offering ministry training in Superior answers only part of the need. Many of the parents and singles who teach religion have trouble traveling; roads are snow-covered during the long, bitter winter, and distances are daunting throughout the year. The most remote parish is tucked in the diocese’s southeast corner, 210 miles from the city of Superior.

Catholic colleges could offer catechist formation, but there are none in the diocese. Regional workshops by the diocesan office fill the gap.



Our Lady of the Lake Chapel, Victory Heights, WI.

In this wonderland of forests, deep-blue lakes, and white frozen hills, Superior’s Catholics see a future of growth, not decline. They look for the next springtime, for the start of the next hundred years. Nature will stretch and show fresh colors, and the Church will display new strengths. ■

“It’s important for catechists to be well-informed and trained in the areas of theology, Scripture, and catechetical methodology,” said Deacon Roger Cadotte, diocesan director of the Religious Education Office. “It’s also important that they have the necessary skills to engage adults and young people in the learning process of their faith.”

In 2005, the Diocese of Superior will celebrate its centennial as the Catholic Church in northern Wisconsin. The courage, energy, and dedication of the countless missionary priests who served before them inspire today’s priests, deacons, women religious, and laity who brave snow-fall up to 200 inches per year to proclaim the ancient Gospel. Wisconsin needs more priests to offer the Eucharist, which is at the core of every Catholic community. These days, the state also needs other ministers to assure the future of those communities.

WHAT DO WE SUPPORT?	
GRANT SUMMARY*	
EVANGELIZATION	
General Evangelization	\$ 1,440,088
Campus Ministry	225,000
Communications	1,024,757
Youth Ministry	516,231
Ministry to Persons with Disabilities	75,755
Migrant Ministry	994,282
Prison Ministry	223,576
Evangelization Subtotal	\$ 4,499,689
MISSION PARISHES	
Mission Parishes	\$ 1,544,483
Operations	486,569
Building and Properties	188,186
Mission Parishes Subtotal	\$ 2,219,238
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION	
Catholic Schools	\$ 288,667
Religious Education	1,106,188
Religious Education Subtotal	\$ 1,394,855
TRAINING FOR MINISTRY	
Seminary Education	\$ 1,254,651
Clergy Training	90,500
Religious Training	31,133
Diaconate Training	312,000
Laity Training	753,434
Training for Ministry Subtotal	\$ 2,441,718
Total for 2003-2004 Regular Grants	\$ 10,555,500



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• COMMITTEE ON THE HOME MISSIONS • **Who Are We?**

The bishops' Committee on the 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 Committee 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 eighty-five home mission dioceses, which include the Eastern Catholic Church eparchies.

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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 parts of the country. Just log on to www.usccb.org/hm and click on **Stories and Pictures from the Field**.