



**CATHOLIC  
HOME  
MISSIONS**

# Professional Development Scholarships Grow Staff Capacity in Home Mission Dioceses



ICSC conference participants enjoying one of many networking opportunities.

By Beth Griffin

**H**ome mission dioceses are challenged by personnel limitations. It is not unusual to have one person doing a job that might occupy an entire department in a larger diocese. One downside of running a lean chancery operation is that staff have few opportunities to learn from and collaborate with fellow professionals in similar roles. Chancery colleagues in different areas can be supportive and helpful, but they might not share the same day-to-day concerns or priorities.

Catholic Home Missions (CHM), through its annual appeal, provides financial grants to home mission dioceses to cover specific areas of need, including pastoral support, vocations,

evangelization, and communications. Over the years, CHM has also funded scholarships to allow representatives from mission dioceses to attend national and regional conferences for professional and formational development in their areas of responsibility.

CHM director Kevin Day says, “The conferences are not only opportunities to glean practical information for immediate use, but they also help participants meet face to face and build a network of colleagues they can call on who understand their specific role in the diocese. They don’t feel they are alone in facing issues.”

For many years, CHM scholarships have helped staff from mission dioceses attend programs on stewardship, catechesis, and financial management. A separate grant has allowed clergy in mission dioceses to participate in retreats and renewal programs convened by Catholic Rural Life. In 2022, scholarship opportunities expanded to new ministries.

Kevin says the expansion of the scholarship program is a direct response to requests made in virtual town hall meetings with leadership and staff in mission dioceses and eparchies in 2020 and 2021. He expects the 2022 CHM scholarship program to award at least 90 grants totaling almost \$120,000. In most cases, the scholarships cover registration and lodging,

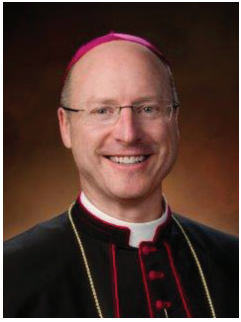
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# Neighbors

ISSUE 1 2022

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

# FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Dedicated lay employees, clergy, and religious sisters and brothers who work in diocesan offices are the behind-the-scenes players who bring their love of Christ and enthusiasm for the Church's mission to

work every day. In home mission dioceses like my own, diocesan offices have fewer staff members and resources, so employees must serve in multiple roles, with fewer colleagues to ask for advice or support. With numerous pastoral needs taking budgetary priority, professional development opportunities for these staff members often go underfunded. The cost of attending those events is often too burdensome.

However, professional development scholarships from Catholic Home Missions provide home mission diocesan and eparchial employees with the opportunity to attend conferences where they can build and strengthen relationships with their peers, learn ways of better serving their local communities, and share their own gifts and knowledge with other participants.

Your generous financial and prayerful support of Catholic Home Missions, especially as we continue to deal with the challenges caused by the pandemic, is vital to the ongoing success of this professional development initiative and to all ministries in our home mission dioceses and eparchies. I am grateful for your dedication to Catholic Home Missions, which makes possible stories like the ones you find in this issue. I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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

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with the sending diocese or eparchy covering transportation and miscellaneous expenses.

The conferences are chosen for their relevance to the priorities and needs of mission dioceses, as well as whether such opportunities are available within the diocese. Some conferences eligible for scholarships again this year are the Diocesan Fiscal Management Conference, the International Catholic Stewardship Conference, and the USCCB Conference for Diocesan Pro-Life Leaders. New offerings come from the National Catholic Office of the Deaf, the Child and Youth Protection Catholic Leadership Conference, the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors, the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, and the Catholic Charities USA Applied Institute for Disaster Excellence.

The response to professional development opportunities has always been positive and enthusiastic, Kevin says. He describes a safe environment program that was cancelled by the pandemic in 2020. "People from 40 of our 78 mission dioceses and eparchies applied to attend. There was great interest. We will offer this opportunity again in 2022," he says.

Each year, the bishops' Subcommittee on Catholic Home Missions sets the direction for the use of CHM funds collected during the annual appeal. During the pandemic, the subcommittee continued to make traditional pastoral support grants for the needs of mission dioceses and eparchies, despite a two-year COVID-related decline in the annual appeal. The subcommittee also heard the need to strengthen formation of vocation directors and catechists who can welcome people with disabilities into full participation in parish life.

Esther Lam, database specialist for the Diocese of Boise, attended a professional conference on a CHM scholarship. Her diocese covers the entire state of Idaho. She attended the International Catholic Stewardship Conference in 2021 at the urging of the diocesan development coordinator in Boise.

"I started my job with the diocese in March 2020 on the verge of the lockdown," Esther says. "I am the only person in my diocese doing the job I do, and I felt very alone for the longest time."

"Going to the conference helped me feel like I have a mission and a purpose," she adds. "Much of what I do relates to software, but I run the annual appeal and talk to donors every day."

She says, "The conference was really inspiring, and I felt like everyone there has a passion for stewardship and what they do."

"I got to build relationships with people who use the same databases and meet with vendors I'd only met through email. This was a great opportunity for back-end staff to get to know people in other places who work in the same environment," Lam says.

Fr. Thomas (Noby) Ayyaneth is the coordinator of pastoral center activities for the St. Mary, Queen of Peace Syro-Malankara Catholic Eparchy. The eparchy was only recently established in 2015 and covers all of the United States and Canada. Its chancery is in Elmont, New York. Fr. Noby also attended the Diocesan Fiscal Management Conference in 2021.



**ICSC business partners offer pastors cutting edge solutions to the challenges they face.**

“This was a big opening for us,” Fr. Noby says. “The eparchy is in its early stages, so there were some sessions that don’t apply to us yet, such as for schools and hospitals, but we could get a glimpse of how people are running their programs.”

“I was trying to get ideas from other dioceses about pastoral programs for youth and children, to help them grow in their faith,” he says. “Our resources are very limited, but we also wish to establish an old-age day care center and assisted-living apartments. Some of our older people have asked for a common facility where they can come together and pray.”

Fr. Noby says that being absent from New York during the conference—he is also responsible for a parish there—was tough for colleagues, who filled in for him, but it was also beneficial to the eparchy because of the larger experience he brought back with him. He has since been in touch with several other conference attendees.

Fr. Ovidiu Marginean is chancellor and chief financial officer for the Romanian Catholic Diocese of Canton in Ohio. The diocese covers the entire United States and Canada. Like Fr. Noby, Fr. Ovidiu attended the Diocesan Fiscal Management Conference in 2021. He has attended the conference in each of the last seven years, but 2021 was his first time doing so on a CHM scholarship.

“It’s inspiring, and I appreciate the camaraderie and fellowship with colleagues in the same field and their

willingness to share their experiences with the group,” Fr. Ovidiu says.

Even though his diocese is in a different league from some others, financially, he says it is good to hear strategies used by his peers. He recalls an investment professional from the University of Notre Dame who described a program with a minimum \$5 million investment—an unthinkable sum for Fr. Ovidiu’s eparchy. “I appreciated that he wanted to share the information, and also thought how easy it is to talk about big sums,” Fr. Ovidiu reflects.

He found a keynote talk on safeguarding information very helpful but also said that conference sessions that address the basics each year are important. “I bring back that info to our clergy,” he says. “I remind them about enforcing audits in the parishes and following best practices on filings, hirings, and payroll.”

“Everyone who starts a diocesan job in finance should be aware of the help that’s offered by the DFMC,” he says.

Fr. Ovidiu says his eparchy is “abundantly” grateful to CHM and the USCCB. “Without CHM, I think we would have been crippled years ago,” he says.

Deacon John Brannen was the director of youth, young adult, and campus ministry for the Diocese of Lexington when he attended the Mid-Atlantic Congress (MAC) for Catholic pastoral and administrative leaders in 2020. He has since moved to a new position as pastoral associate at Pax Christi parish in Lexington.

Deacon John says he was chosen to represent Lexington’s pastoral life secretariat at MAC and to collect information for others in the secretariat. “It was a great opportunity to look at professional development outside my own area and be there for the benefit of my colleagues,” he says.

The theme of MAC in 2020 was “One, Holy, Apostolic.” Deacon John says the reflections of keynote speaker Dr. Timone Davis on the word “holy” and teachings by Newark’s Cardinal

Joseph Tobin on the word “one” continue to resonate with him. “There was a great focus on lay people in leadership roles in dioceses and parishes,” he recalls.

Coming to MAC from the area of youth ministry, he participated in a breakout session on accompaniment, but he was able to experience the discussion through the broader lens of the pastoral responsibilities of his chancery colleagues. Deacon John’s co-workers were grateful for the insights he shared from the congress, he says.

He encourages others to apply for CHM professional development scholarships. “Any time there’s an opportunity to network is important. We all live in our own little silos, but we’re bigger than that, and networking lets us see the larger view of accompaniment,” he says.

Cesar Salas is chief development officer for the Diocese of Tyler in Texas. He attended the International Catholic Stewardship Conference in 2021. In two previous years, he attended the same conference as a representative of a vendor, his former employer, called Community Counseling Services.

As a diocesan participant, Cesar got to focus on the conference sessions in a new way. He was determined to learn as much as possible about two growing areas with which he was largely unfamiliar: annuities and social media programs. “I took a ton of notes and walked my staff through everything when I got back,” he says.

In addition, he was able to interact with counterparts from other Texas dioceses, which he says is rare. “In east Texas, we’re insular. I have a small shop compared to bigger places in Texas, and it’s generally harder to have sessions with peers in our state. The conference provided that opportunity for me,” he says.

“It was surprising to me how much information I could get from the sessions. People shared data and strategies I would not have gotten if we were not face to face, and they felt as though they were the teachers,” Cesar says. ☺



*Strengthening the Church at Home*

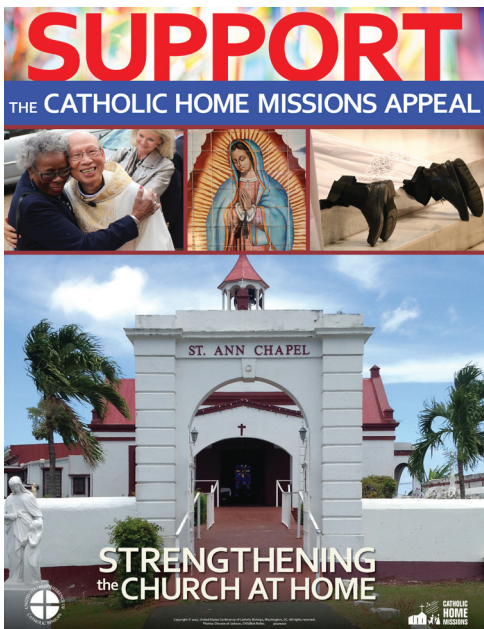
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READ ABOUT how diocesan staff receive valuable training at professional development conferences with the support of scholarships from Catholic Home Missions.



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