



Strengthening the Church at Home

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CATHOLIC HOME MISSIONS

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON CATHOLIC HOME MISSIONS

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www.usccb.org/home-missions

DID YOU KNOW?

- The diocese-based Project Rachel Ministry provides a compassionate, confidential, and healing response to women and men who have participated in abortion. For more information about Project Rachel Ministry, visit www.HopeAfterAbortion.org or www.EsperanzaPosAborto.org.
- Walking with Moms in Need is a call from the bishops encouraging the faithful to make their parishes and communities sources of support for pregnant and parenting moms. For more information on Walking with Moms in Need, visit www.walkingwithmoms.com.

Our work is supported by the annual collection taken up in U.S. parishes. If you missed your parish collection, you may send your donation to: USCCB Office of National Collections | P. O. 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: <https://usccb.givecatholictogether.org/organizations/usccb-catholic-home-missions>

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**CATHOLIC
HOME
MISSIONS**

Helping Moms in Need: Diocesan Pro-Life Leadership Conference



L to R: Michael Ebert (accepting posthumously on behalf of his wife, Laura), Mary Huber, and Greg Schleppenbach received the 2022 People of Life Awards for their years of dedicated service to the pro-life movement. The award recipients were honored at the 2022 Diocesan Pro-Life Leadership Conference in Baltimore.

By Beth Griffin

Mission dioceses are so different from others. We have one person heading multiple offices, but in non-mission dioceses, they may have multiple people working in each office,” says Jayne Stefanic.

The director of Marriage, Family, and Respect Life for the Diocese of Savannah is not complaining. She’s describing why she jumped at the opportunity to attend the Diocesan Pro-Life Leadership Conference on a scholarship from Catholic Home Missions (CHM).

“I’m a one-person office, so networking with others who do the same ministry in other places is key. I can read documents and listen to webinars, but when people get together in person, we can ask questions and share experiences,” Jayne says.

CHM makes grants to mission dioceses largely to cover specific areas of need, including pastoral

support, vocations, evangelization, and communications. In recent years, CHM scholarships have also allowed representatives from mission dioceses to attend national and regional conferences for professional development and formation in their areas of responsibility, including vocations, safe environments, stewardship, catechesis, and financial management.

Kenneth Ong, CHM grants specialist, says, “Our professional development scholarships are a way for CHM to help mission dioceses provide additional education for diocesan personnel and for them to meet and collaborate with others in their specialized fields.”

The scholarship program awards approximately \$120,000 to 100 individuals each year to pay for conference registration, lodging, and transportation.

In 2022, CHM coordinated with the USCCB Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities to sponsor 19 participants attending the annual Diocesan Pro-Life Leadership Conference in Baltimore.

More than 100 representatives from 92 dioceses participated both in person and virtually at the four-day conference in July, the first conference since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. The theme was “Life in the Eucharist.”

Erin Younkins is the director of Life, Justice, and Peace for the Institute for Evangelization of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. On a panel of diocesan leaders, she described her experiences implementing the USCCB Walking with Moms in Need initiative.

“It’s really a paradigm shift in the way Catholics address life issues,” she says. “Instead of offering

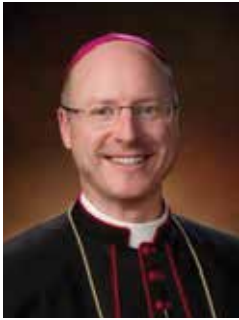
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Neighbors

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A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM MISSION AMERICA

FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Dear Brothers
and Sisters in Christ,

The Catholic Church is recognized as a foremost leader in the pro-life movement in the United States. For decades, Catholic clergy, religious orders, health-care institutions, lay ministries, and activists have spoken out in passionate defense of human life from conception until natural death.

Our public witness and advocacy is well known, but the Church's efforts do not stop there. Every day, diocesan leaders and volunteers work in relative anonymity to help mothers find the support and resources they need in order to choose life for their babies. The annual Diocesan Pro-Life Leadership Conference brings together those diocesan leaders to build connections, keep abreast of legal developments, and learn to implement and grow ministries and programs to assist vulnerable moms in their own dioceses.

In this issue, you'll learn how professional development scholarships from Catholic Home Missions enabled 19 participants from home mission dioceses to attend the 2022 conference in Baltimore, Maryland, where they learned about programs such as the USCCB's Walking with Moms in Need initiative, which assesses the unique needs of moms and works to meet those needs.

Although the legal landscape changed drastically with the 2022 Supreme Court ruling overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the Church recognizes that a culture of life grows through ministering to the needs of vulnerable moms and families. Your support of Catholic Home Missions is a crucial part of this effort to build a culture of life in mission dioceses where needs are greatest. I am grateful for your continued, life-giving support.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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

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money, diapers, and a good luck wish, Walking with Moms in Need provides a hand to grasp. It acknowledges that the woman is a sister in Christ and belongs to our community.”

“It asks parishioners to be in conversation and look at what moms really need,” Erin adds. “The program asks people to inventory what is available locally by way of pregnancy centers, medical facilities, food, housing, and immigration assistance.”

“After that, we ask them to identify gaps, such as day care, housing, and service to fathers. We say, ‘pick one gap and be creative,’” she explains.

One successful model—developed by the Maryland-based Gabriel Network—establishes Angel Friend teams, in which individuals accompany a woman through her pregnancy and the first two years of her child's life. The Angel Friends help with parenting training, infant care, and access to community resources. Many establish lasting relationships with the women they befriend.

“We know that 80% of the women we serve feel that abortion is their only choice. We are looking to build a culture of life and create opportunities for women and families to thrive,” Erin says.

“We did a tremendous job for 20 years with pregnancy care centers, but moms need community,” she says.

The conference reminded Erin that the pro-life ministry is one of evangelization. “We're not just about advocacy and anti-abortion; we're evangelizing families who are new or outside a parish community and letting them know we honor all life,” she says.

In the wake of the Supreme Court's 2022 decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, Erin says, “We have to refocus efforts at the parish level toward service and building a culture of life and away from a hyperfocus on laws. We have to be a field hospital serving people who are currently in crisis.”

Jayne says the conference demonstrated that implementing Walking with Moms in Need is not as complicated as it initially seemed to her. She is already sharing ideas with her counterparts in the Archdiocese of Atlanta to see how Savannah might replicate some initiatives. A statewide March for Life was held on February 9, 2023.

Jayne was moved by the reflections of Bishop Mark E. Brennan of Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia, in his keynote address. “He said our ministry has to be filled with compassion both for others and for ourselves. We have to take care of our spiritual life to be able to serve others,” she recalls. “He speaks from the heart.”



Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, chairman of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities, addresses attendees at the 2022 Diocesan Pro-Life Leadership Conference in Baltimore.

“The experience of the conference has reenergized me in my ministry,” Jayne says.

Deacon Paul Boboige is the coordinator of Pro-Life for the Byzantine Catholic Archeparchy (or archdiocese) of Pittsburgh. His ministry is also a one-person office.

He says he would have been unable to attend the event without the CHM scholarship. Deacon Paul appreciated the practical advice from the scheduled sessions. “As is the case in many conferences, the best conversations came during meals when I was able to talk specifically about things pertinent to my geographically widespread eparchy,” he explains. The Pittsburgh archeparchy covers nine states.

Sr. Janine Tran is director of Evangelization and Catechesis and Respect Life for the Diocese of Springfield–Cape Girardeau, Missouri, another home missions diocese. She added the pro-life role to her diocesan responsibilities after she accepted the CHM scholarship but before she attended the conference.

“It was amazing,” she says of the conference. “It was my first experience with the pro-life movement on the national level.”

Sr. Janine appreciated the conference’s robust schedule and how speakers such as Baltimore’s Archbishop William E. Lori addressed both spiritual and practical components of the pro-life effort.

“I was most impressed that we had a chapel available with the Blessed Sacrament at all times,” she says.

While there, Sr. Janine made contact with directors from three other mission dioceses. “It’s a huge plus to know there are other directors trying to do the same work. We will definitely be in touch, but not right away, because many of us wear other hats besides the respect-life role back in our dioceses,” Sr. Janine says.

The panel on implementing Walking with Moms in Need was helpful to Sr. Janine. She also appreciated the discussions of Project Rachel Ministry, the diocese-based abortion healing ministry of the Church in the United States. Project Rachel offers a compassionate, confidential response to women and men who have participated in abortion. The ministry provides an integrated network of services, including sacramental reconciliation, pastoral counseling, support groups, retreats, and referrals to licensed mental health professionals.

“There is a lot of silence around Project Rachel,” Sr. Janine says. “It has been advertised and promoted, but people are not tapping into the resource. What does it mean when people aren’t calling us?” she wonders.

“We have to refocus efforts at the parish level toward service and building a culture of life and away from a hyperfocus on laws. We have to be a field hospital serving people who are currently in crisis.”

Sandra Barros is the director of Evangelization and Faith Formation for the Diocese of Yakima, Washington, another home missions diocese. She had attended the annual pro-life conference virtually in the past and found it “enlightening and enriching,” she says, but “going in person was a unique experience because of the opportunities to interact and make contacts. You get a sense of how various dioceses approach different situations, especially at this time,” she says.

“We all have the same issues: It’s difficult to reach and maintain volunteers. Parishioners have different levels of commitment. How do we capture the attention of

the youth? What is the most successful way to use social media?” Sandra ticks off her concerns.

“In this time when values are messed up, Christ shows us the way. The challenge is there, and the Holy Spirit comes to help,” she says.

Sandra, who practiced law in Peru before moving to central Washington State, says Bishop Brennan’s keynote speech on the culture and history of pro-life policies was outstanding. Presenter Erica Bachiochi, an attorney and a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, “was factual, analytic, and developed her points amazingly. It’s very important for us to learn the history, understand how we got here, and apply that knowledge to the future,” Sandra says.

Sandra was able to share her experience with the statewide PREPARES (pregnancy and parenting support) program, an initiative of the Washington State Catholic Conference that is developed and managed by Catholic Charities and the parishes of the state’s three dioceses. Similar to Walking with Moms in Need, PREPARES offers help, support, and accompaniment to women throughout pregnancy and the first five years of the child’s life.

“The conference helps us all to be on the same page and focus on the same goals: to enrich our communities and provide hope, faith, and love for families. It’s an opportunity to learn from one another and not feel isolated,” Sandra says.

Bishop Stephen D. Parkes of Savannah was one of several bishops who expressed appreciation for the CHM scholarship grants. He said, “I think it is vitally important that our ministry leaders interact with their counterparts across the country to learn from one another and to support one another, but the limited resources of a mission diocese can sometimes make this difficult. Thanks to the generosity of Catholic Home Missions, our ministry leaders can attend national events like the Pro-Life Leadership Conference and be a part of the larger community that comes from shared ideas. I am grateful for their support of our diocese and the many others like us in the United States.” ■