

Pastoral Visit with Bishop Neary November 2023

This was our inaugural Pastoral Visit with Bishop Neary. These three Area Catholic Communities (ACC) joined Bishop Neary and other pastoral leaders: Harvest of Hope (Albany, Avon, St. Anthony, St. Martin), Northern Cross (Butler, Dent, Perham Rush Lake and One in Faith (Freeport, Greenwald, Meire Grove, Melrose, New Munich, Spring Hill, St. Rosa).

The goals of these visits are:

- To build bridges for a thriving mission across parishes in an ACC.
- To develop ACCs as learning communities through listening and dialogue.
- To offer radical hospitality to nurture relationships between Bishop Neary, the diocesan staff and ACC pastoral leadership.

We began our morning at the Cathedral of Saint Mary with Bishop Neary's opening remarks and six priorities, a video presentation on Bridge-Builders for a Thriving Mission and the Celebration of the Eucharist. Bishop Neary's six priorities (in no particular order) are: thrivingmission.org

1. The well-being, support and enrichment of the diocesan pastoral team.
2. Care for the priests of the diocese
3. Seeing synodality as a model for the Church and the Diocese of Saint Cloud
4. Eucharistic Revival in the Diocese of Saint Cloud
5. The Latino presence in the Diocese of Saint Cloud
6. Strategic planning for the next phase of our ACCs.

In the afternoon, each ACC presented their story in 20–30-minute segments. To view the ACC PowerPoints, visit: www.thrivingmission.org.

Each ACC named one common activity that they have done as an ACC, for example:

Harvest of Hope: BINGO post-pandemic. The parishes rotated hosting BINGO and it has generated a sense of community. They also introduced trivia questions about each parish to strengthen a sense of community history.

Northern Cross: Deacon Mark Stenger's fundraiser, and Chubby Sunday which is a soup and chili cooking contest.

One in Faith: Nurturing a Eucharistic Spirituality such as Divine Mercy Sunday, outdoor Assumption Mass with Bishop Neary, Corpus Christi procession.

Thanks to all who filled out an evaluation afterwards. What are people saying about our day together?

Honestly, the entire day was wonderful! The best part for me was the personal interaction and discussions with Bishop Neary, the diocesan staff, and the people from the other ACCs present.

The best part was hearing from other ACCs and how they are growing, learning and being challenged. Sort of interesting that some issues were common to all of them - but how different solutions were applied.

I think it really opened the eyes of some ACC pastoral council members and made them feel like they made a difference.

The best part was the preparation we did as an ACC. It gave us a chance to recall all that had been and the value of what we are doing together.

The interaction with Bishop Neary. He is very personable. I liked the round table discussions at the end, interacting with various ACC's.



Here is a summary of the strengths and challenges presented:

Strengths	Challenges
People: Sense of community, volunteerism, strong faith	Lack of faith involvement and Mass attendance
People seem to bounce around the parishes comfortably	Communication, communication, communication
An example of early wins at Harvest of Hope: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early success - Rural Life Celebration • Separate but unified faith formation programs: this year share a common theme. • Common Confirmation standards • Sacramental Preparation (Baptism, Weddings) • Shared funeral resources 	Fear of losing parish identity... dissolving parish councils a concern for people.
Catholic Schools	Finding new volunteers... the same people always seem to step up.
Beginning to see the value of shared events	Rotating clergy every weekend can create a sense of inconsistency.
Strengthening ACC identity	Energy devoted to pastoral care with multiple parishes.

We ended the day with a synodal listening process with mixed groups from the different ACCs. We asked two questions: What is the Holy Spirit calling the Church in Central Minnesota to? How can we strengthen co-responsibility for the mission? (Spoiler alert: it seems some people did not understand this question, and we will adjust the question for our next Pastoral Visit). Below is a summary:

- Bring more joy to our ACCs. Get out of our comfort zone and be disciples.
- Welcome and invite those who are 'hanging around' or lost at the margins.
- Frustration with the diocese and understanding the vision of ACCs.
- A strong call for more formation in the teachings and rules of the faith, a desire to hold on to tradition.
- A call for clarity and boldness in leadership — leadership that offers clear answers and guidance to people.
- We still need to tackle evangelization and ministry with our Hispanic people.
- I am from an ACC with 2 pastors. It is confirmed to me at this meeting, for the ACC model to work well, each ACC needs to have 1 pastor with parochial vicars under them.
- Encourage the diocese to communicate with the ACC, rather than individual parishes. This will reflect the ACC structure.

Postscript

The Pastoral Visits with Bishop Neary were coordinated by Brenda Kresky, director, Planning Office and Barbara Sutton, director, Bridge-Builders for a Thriving Mission. We are genuinely grateful for the efforts and commitments of these Area Catholic Communities. They are designed so that we might all be a learning community, month after month. Learning together equips us to be stewards of the mission and better able to serve one another. This was our first and the evaluations concur with what we felt, that this is a wonderful and hospitable opportunity to expand our ministry. There are still some wrinkles to iron out in our day, and we appreciate the feedback such as timing of sessions, awkward transitions, making theological language accessible, better sound system, and the sun in our eyes! Blessings on this Advent season.

For an ACC consultation contact info@thrivingmission.org



Brenda Kresky *Barbara A. Sutton*

