

## Pastoral Visit with Bishop Neary December 2023

We welcomed these three Area Catholic Communities to the Cathedral of St. Mary, St. Cloud for a Pastoral Visit with Bishop Neary: Benedictine Community (Collegeville, St. Joseph), Christ Our Hope (Eden Valley, Lake Henry, Rosco, Paynesville, Watkins), One in Christ (Mayhew Lake, Sartell, Sauk Rapids, St. Stephen).

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:

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 and other documents, visit: [www.thrivingmission.org](http://www.thrivingmission.org).

Common themes among the three ACCs gathered were chaos, change and priorities. The presentations ranged from a single presenter to a skit the portrayed real dilemmas at an ACC Council meeting.

**Benedictine Community:** They recognize the challenge of collaboration between a large parish and a small parish. Competition diminishes bridge-building. It has taken time, and they are forming friendships with one another. They are recognizing the different and unique gifts each parish brings to the ACC. As an ACC, they hold Benedictine values in common and are rooted in the Word and Worship.

**Christ Our Hope:** They struggle with moving from twinned parish relationships to an ACC model. The twinned configuration with parishes has worked well here. There are a lot of activities and efforts that have been sustained in the last few years. They don't lack persistence. Change is not easy, whether it is change in pastors or mass schedules. Their current priorities are: bereavement ministry, leadership development, developing an ACC Council in an effort to move towards a unified ACC.

**One in Christ:** As they came and shared their story of becoming an ACC, they noted that pre-pandemic life has come back! Parishioners have a genuine love for the church. They have a small group of highly motivated leaders. Their collaborative initiatives are: 1) quarterly newsletter, 2) Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest document, 3) joint pictorial directory, and 4) joint volunteers. These four parishes share a Young Adult Lay Ecclesial Minister and Leadership Team that focuses on community, formation, worship and mission. They believe they are better together!

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



"People behave irrationally when the focus of the conversation is around closing parishes; how do we work instead on building trust and letting people know we're talking about building the Body of Christ, versus closing?"

ACC is not so much what they "did" or about their combined events. The change is evident in how they speak of each other and act with each other. I

I learned from the video and especially the question... if money was not an issue, what would you do?

Tell us what the other attendees are listening for. We have heard from the bishop and planning office. What about the others?

Best part of my day was that our Diocese and Bishop listened to learn how it is going across our ACCs.

I highly endorse this process to listen to all the ACCs before deciding the future and the time given by Bishop and staff to do it says so much

We ended the day with a synodal listening process with mixed groups from the different ACCs. We asked three questions: What is the Holy Spirit calling the Church in Central Minnesota to? How can we strengthen co-responsibility for the mission? What are our significant learnings and next steps? Below is a summary:

- People were surprised about how much positivity there was in all the presentations, the Spirit is calling on us to be more positive in this process. We need to meet people where they are, not where we are. We need to walk together and be non-judgmental.
- Look back and celebrate how the parish communities have grown together. Continue to invite parishioners and guests to parish/ACC events and ministry opportunities. Continue building on the mission and faith formation within the parishes. Evangelize: Be deliberate in encountering others as Jesus would.
- 1radical hospitality and be more welcoming. Adapt to today's culture to engage people on the peripheries. Becoming better disciples by walking with and listening to others.
- The Church is not just the parish or the ACC. We are Church all together. We need to build relationships.'

#### Postscript

Each of us can live in a bubble! However, listening to Bishop Neary and our Area Catholic Communities provides insight into little bridges which connect us outside of our usual bubbles. These bridges are powerful things – they're the infrastructure of new friendships and, in clustered communities, the engineering of stronger, more resilient communities. The more bridges we can build, the more resilient our Area Catholic Communities will become.

#### Be A Bridge Builder

- Recognize and celebrate the bridges you have already built



- Identify where your bridges are strong, where they could be stronger and where they are under strain, or yet to be made.
- Explore practical ideas, ways of working and guiding principles on how to make positive connections across divides.

For an ACC consultation contact [info@thrivingmission.org](mailto:info@thrivingmission.org)

*Brenda Kresky*      *Barbara A. Sutton*

The One in Christ ACC spoke about a prayer they used for their ACC Council

### Opening Prayer

O God of Life,  
We seek your guidance  
as we face the reality  
of transition and change.

Transition is a challenge and can be exciting  
as we try to move with foresight into the future.  
Change is a challenge to let go.  
It takes courage and confidence to move toward a new goal.

Loving God,  
give us open minds, kind hearts, and clear vision  
as together we look to a future in which we can still serve You.  
Help us to plan with a 'big picture' mentality—  
to seek diligently and generously  
what is in the best interest of all.

May Jesus, our Shepherd and Guide,  
lead us in ways that are right and good.  
May Mary, Mother of our Church,  
encourage our efforts  
to listen and learn.

In the words of the prophet Micah,  
may we "act justly, love tenderly  
and walk humbly with our God."  
Amen.

### Closing Prayer

O Spirit of God,  
We ask you to help orient all our actions  
by your inspirations,  
Carry them on by your gracious assistance,  
That every prayer and work of ours  
may always begin from you  
and through be happily ended. Amen

Author unknown. Supplied by Jason Prigge

