

Pastoral Visit with Bishop Neary — January 2024

We welcomed these three Area Catholic Communities to the Cathedral of St. Mary, St. Cloud, for a Pastoral Visit with Bishop Neary: Isanti (Braham, Cambridge, Isanti), Parishes on the Prairie (Belgrade, Brooten, Elrosa, Sauk Centre, West Union), WOHVn in Faith (Wahkon, Hillman, Onamia, Vineland).

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 St. 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 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.

Each ACC presented their story in 20- to 30-minute segments. To view the ACC PowerPoints and other documents, visit: www.thrivingmission.org.

Common themes among the three ACCs gathered were prayerful communities, change, history of working together, questions about the future, social justice. Each presentations provided an opportunity for three to seven people to tell the story of their ACC.

Isanti Catholic Community: They were accustomed to the cluster model before the ACC developed. They have revised their bulletin, families enjoy each other, have a visible model of charity and service, and have introduced the Pathways Family Faith Formation program. Challenges that the pastor faces are the people's lack of understanding of what it means to be Church, people are tied to their individual churches and yet they cannot stand alone. They are strengthening their hospitality and encouraging people to cross parish lines.

Parishes on the Prairie: Overall they are gradually increasing in Mass attendance, even with fewer Masses available. Praying boldly and faithfully is important for this ACC. They have a beautiful Catechetical Center. They show gratitude for volunteers with a Thank You banquet. The Youth Mass moves around the ACC. They listen and hear the pain and loss of declining communities. Fifty years ago, they had seven priests, today they have two. They noted when there were two pastors in the ACC the decision-making was sluggish, they had not learned yet to dance together. A challenge in the ACC is that small parishes feel overlooked, or they do not have a voice in the vision. There is a sense that things have moved to the northern part of the ACC. There is an ardent call to help parishes that are grieving loss.

WOHVn in Faith: This ACC has a 20-year history of working together. They are proud to be a part of the Crosier Catholic community, it provides durability for the ACC. The social concerns ministry is active and visible in the community. They provide a Thanksgiving dinner for those in the community and on the margins. They were awarded money from a local business because of the success of their social concerns in the community. A struggle is the need for more lay faithful to serve in various ministries. Also, they would like to be more visible to the Mille Lacs Reservation.



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

"Thank you for your 'yes' to being a Bishop. There are difficult times ahead, especially when you look at the statistic of being 4th in the nation with the ratio of buildings to priests. That tells us there are some hard decisions ahead and we want to care for our priests. I appreciated your approach of having the Holy Spirit in these hard times. I would really be interested if there is a formal plan/process on how to help grieving people in the loss of their Church not being what it used to be."

"Some of us had misconceptions about the other parishes in our ACC – privileged vs. the 'ugly cousin.' We proved we all had something to offer, and I felt all our voices were heard."

"I left at the end of the day feeling inspired and energized to do what I can to inform, inspire and listen to all as we move forward. Also, I am hoping to be able to be a leader who can recognize and draw out gifts to help our ACC become a thriving Church community."

We ended the day with a synodal listening process with mixed groups from the different ACCs. We asked three questions: What have I heard today that is important? Why is what we hear today important for strengthening the mission? Going forth, how can this impact what we do? In our Parish? Our ACC? In the Diocese? Below is a summary:

- The lay faithful helping in parishes is dwindling. Some communities are shrinking. We need to help people recognize their gifts and make room for them in our ACCs.
- Hope comes together as people share commonality and differences. Hope is our way forward as we live as resurrected people.
- Build a bridge of care for those hurting and grieving losses in their parishes.
- We have been in small tents and are now coming together in a big tent. Train leaders for this model. People are asking diocesan leaders for help to develop this ACC model.
- The spiritual life is as important as the buildings in an ACC.

Postscript

Igniting the Dream is essential to the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. Consider these points for reflection:

- There is power in acknowledging pain, fear, and loss.
- Your active compassion may even generate hope and fire people up to release their fears and exercise leadership themselves.
- Too often we think we have a better understanding of our situation than we do. Few people probe deep enough to identify the experiments and smart risks that will lead to real progress. Few people spend enough time listening to others to understand what's really going on.
- Don't just stand there. Do something!
- Pausing to take the temperature can appear to the uninitiated like you're doing nothing. Test multiple interpretations. The more eyes and ears you have on the problem, the more options you will find for action.

Fr. Tom Knoblach, Vicar for Clergy shared this article about Pope Francis call to universities in Rome to plan for the future: [Too Many Ecclesiastical Universities in Rome](#)

For an ACC consultation contact info@thrivingmission.org



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