

Pastoral Visit with Bishop Neary — February 2024

We welcomed these three Area Catholic Communities to the Cathedral of St. Mary, St. Cloud, for a Pastoral Visit with Bishop Neary: Centered on Christ (Cold Spring, Jacobs Prairie, Richmond, Rockville), Come to the Water (Alexandria, Belle River, Osakis) and Four Pillars in Faith (Foreston, Milaca, Mora, Ogilvie).

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.

Our day at the Cathedral of St. Mary included Bishop Neary's opening remarks and six priorities, and the Celebration of the Eucharist. Bishop Neary's six priorities are:

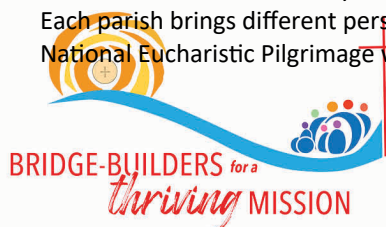
1. The well-being, support, and enrichment of the diocesan pastoral team.
2. Care for the priests of the diocese.
3. Seeing synodality as a model for the Church and the Diocese of Saint Cloud.
4. Eucharistic Revival in the Diocese of Saint Cloud.
5. The Latino presence in the Diocese of Saint Cloud.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

Each ACC presented their history with stories, data, maps, and a desire to create unity. They were all very different in size, configuration and how they have developed as an ACC. To view the ACC PowerPoints and other documents, visit: www.thrivingmission.org. Common themes among the three ACCs gathered were size, whether large or small, the need for better communication and transparency, and the work of the laity, whether in paid or unpaid roles. All understood the pressures of ACC leadership for their pastors. Each presentation provided an opportunity for three to seven people to tell the story of their ACC. They are summarized here:

Centered on Christ: They are collaborating as four parishes and two schools to form missionary disciples. As they transition from a Benedictine ACC to the diocese, they hold fast to hospitality. An ACC culture develops through an ACC Pastoral Council, a shared directory, bulletin, and the website. The main office is at Saint Boniface. They build community through quarterly events and appreciate Deacon Larry's weekly reflections and Fr. LeRoy's Cabin Fever videos. The Hispanic/Latino Community is active with a bilingual Mass, three Spanish-speaking priests. They have a well-rounded catechetical and sacramental formation process for their Latino community and are assisted by Br. Felix Martin, OSB, S. Judy Kramer, OSB, Fr. Efrain Rosado, OSB. They host three social media platform: Casa San Benito, Iglesia Maria Immaculada, and Santa Maria Del Camino.

Come to the Water: Bridge-building through hospitality, stewardship and responsibility as a way of life and servant leadership reflect the values they nurture. They expressed many of the ways they contribute to the diocesan mission through the stewardship of sharing their building as well as staff collaboration. This ACC has a history of professional development for their staff. They encouraged more events like the Pastoral Visits with Bishop Neary that build relationships across the diocese as well as ongoing learning. They called for more consistent faith formation programs diocesan wide. And they would like an app for the Diocese of Saint Cloud. Efforts are being made to build community across the ACC.

Four Pillars in Faith: They are building a cohesive and unified mission by strengthening youth engagement, improving communication and transparency, fostering a culture of prayer and reflection, and expanding their outreach. To prepare for this visit they surveyed the people in the ACC. They are proud of their involvement in diocesan events such as the Rural Life Celebration, Pathways. Rotating dinners and socials among the parishes create a sense of community. They struggle with planning and communication and distance between parishes. Each parish brings different perspectives and history. They are nurturing a deep Eucharistic spirituality and the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage will be going through Mora.



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

I appreciated that Bishop Neary was willing to share an entire day getting to know the “sheep”. As a person that enjoys spinning wool from sheep to a finished project, I know that things can start out dirty and smelly. With work and care something beautiful is created from that pile of messy wool. Thank you to Bishop Patrick for his humility and grace.

Continue to reach out is the key. Asking the question, "How can we help?" so that people in ministry don't feel like they are on their own. Often another ACC has found a way to solve a problem. Having the diocese leadership be a conduit of sharing information keeps us from having to “reinvent the wheel”.

How the feeling of loss due to a closing really takes time to heal. We are deeply rooted in our parishes, and we must let go of some things to continue.

I enjoyed learning how each community is special. Everyone has a unique history and certain events that shape the culture of their ACCs. I think I will try to make brief pilgrimages to other ACCs to experience some of those special events.

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:

- Communication and transparency are a common issue across ACCs. People are sometimes unsure of what they are to do in this new structure. This is important to build a sense of trust. Belonging is important because then people know their gifts and hopes are treasured.
- We need to balance the needs of the large ACCs with the needs of the smaller ACCs. And within an ACC we need to balance the needs of the larger parish with the smaller parish. In this way, resources will be distributed equitably, and people will be seen. It will be more cohesion through the diocese.
- Recognizing the uniqueness of each parish. Like a family, one unit is made up of individuals. The ACC can come together as a united family. It is important to make this intentional and *a priority*.
- Formation in faith is essential to the development of the ACC because you cannot give what you don't have. Educated parishioners will understand a commitment to mission. We will be stronger and renewed with formation in the faith.

Postscript: What about those smaller ACCs, or those smaller parishes within an ACC? How do we do mission together without feeling vulnerable? In the land of 10,000 lakes, perhaps the Rules of the Sea might inform this question. Imagine a speedboat and a sailboat on a lake together. Which is the most privileged? The purpose of the Rules is to clarify that the vessel with greater resources has a responsibility to a vessel with fewer resources in terms of power to maneuver. The vessel with greater power is the “burdened” party; the vessel with lesser power is the “privileged” party. These classifications create a moral responsibility based on power and vulnerability. Although this runs counter to our standard social analysis which associates privilege with having power and resources and burden (of limited human and financial resources, for example) with the absence of power and resources, it is language more fitting for our moral awareness as people of faith and church structures. In our ACCs, empathy is power. It is not power over another. It is an empowerment that invites and leverages the gifts of the community for the other. It is not to be hoarded. It is being good neighbors.

For an ACC consultation contact info@thrivingmission.org



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