

# PASTORAL GUIDEBOOK

for *All Things New* Pastoral Planning Process

**2025-26**



D I O C E S E O F S A I N T C L O U D

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# PRAYER FOR ALL THINGS NEW



Ever-present God,  
just as you accompanied our biblical ancestors,  
so, too, you accompanied our ancestors  
who came to Central Minnesota generations ago  
to begin a new life and set down  
their roots of faith in our churches.

Be with us now as we, the people of the Diocese of St. Cloud,  
embark on a new, uncharted journey,  
heeding your call for renewal and transformation.

Send forth your gifts of  
courage, compassion, trust and collaboration.

Help us discern the best ways  
we can fulfill your call to missionary discipleship  
with vibrant communities and effective ministries.  
Open our hearts to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit  
and give us the grace we need for this journey  
as you make all things new.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
with the intercession of Mary, our Mother,  
and St. Cloud, our patron. Amen.

# Moving forward: Hope and Resurrection

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we walk together through the All Things New pastoral planning process, I want to acknowledge both the hope and the hardship that come with change. For some, this journey has already brought grief and uncertainty. For others, it has opened doors to new opportunities and deeper collaboration. Wherever you find yourself today, know that you are not alone. We are one body in Christ, and we carry one another's burdens.

Our baptism calls us to do hard things. It calls us to listen when it would be easier to turn away, to serve when it would be easier to remain comfortable and to forgive when it would be easier to hold on to resentment. These are not optional tasks. They are the very heart of discipleship.

I ask you to remember that the Church does not change for the sake of change. She changes to remain faithful to her mission: to proclaim the Gospel, to celebrate the sacraments and to serve the poor and the vulnerable. This process is not about loss – it is about renewal. It is about allowing the Holy Spirit to breathe new life into our parishes, our ministries and our hearts.

As your bishop, I commit to continue listening, discerning and walking with you. I cannot promise that every decision will be easy or that everyone will be satisfied. But I can promise that every decision will be made with prayer, with consultation and with a sincere desire to serve Christ and His people.

Let us move forward together with courage and hope. Let us be missionary disciples who embrace the hard things, trusting that God is making all things new. And let us never forget that resurrection always follows the cross.

Yours in Christ,

+Patrick M. Neary, C.S.C.  
Bishop of Saint Cloud

# Introduction

Change is never easy. It stirs grief, questions and sometimes resistance. Yet, as people of faith, we know that change is also the place where God often does the most transformative work. The Diocese of St. Cloud, through the All Things New pastoral planning process, is entering a season of discernment and renewal. This guidebook was created to accompany you – pastoral leaders, parish staff, ACC committees and parishioners – as we walk together through this journey.

The Church has always held together two truths: she is rooted in permanence, and she is alive with renewal. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8), and yet the Spirit continually calls us to conversion, to deeper listening and to missionary discipleship. This book is a companion. It offers theological grounding, pastoral wisdom and practical tools to help us foster renewal instead of resistance and mission instead of maintenance.

This guidebook is meant to support you in that call, reminding us that we are not alone in this work. We are one body, one Church and one mission.

## How to use this guidebook

This book is organized into four parts, each addressing a dimension of pastoral life during times of change. It is to be used as a support resource as needs arise in your parish or ministry. It is not meant to be comprehensive but to provide some foundations for moving forward.

Appendices provide ready-to-use resources: sample intercessions, bulletin announcements, homily helps and reflection prompts. Use these when you need practical, concrete tools for communication and prayer.

# THE ROLE OF PASTORAL LEADERS IN TIMES OF CHANGE/HOW TO SUPPORT PARISH LEADERS AND STAFF

*By Matt Reichert*

Change is one of the few constants in human experience (along with death and taxes). Culture shifts, technologies evolve and values are debated and redefined. Amid all this adaptation, the Catholic Church seems to stand as a witness to permanence – a 2,000-year-old community rooted in the unchanging truth of Jesus Christ. And yet, the Church is also alive, dynamic and always in need of renewal.

The Catholic view of change is not one of fear or resistance. Rather, it is a vision grounded in conversion, discernment and fidelity. The Church believes that authentic change does not mean abandoning her foundations but allowing the Holy Spirit to draw her ever closer to Christ and her mission.

A key expression of this vision is found in the Vatican's 2020 instruction "The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelizing Mission of the Church." This document, issued by the Congregation for the Clergy, articulates how the Church understands change – not as rupture or innovation for its own sake, but as the fruit of pastoral conversion and missionary renewal.

These are all important considerations for us here in the Diocese of St. Cloud as we journey together through the process of pastoral planning. As we enter the next phase of our planning initiative, let's explore the interplay between permanence and conversion, both for ourselves and our parish communities.

## **The foundation: An unchanging truth**

At the heart of Catholic teaching lies the conviction that divine revelation – God's self-communication in Jesus Christ – is complete and definitive. As the Letter to the Hebrews proclaims, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). The Deposit of Faith (Depositum Fidei), which includes all that God has revealed through Scripture and Tradition, is entrusted to the Church to be faithfully guarded and transmitted (Dei Verbum, 10).

The Church cannot alter this revelation; she can only deepen her understanding of it. The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains, "The Christian faith cannot accept 'revelations' that claim to surpass or correct the Revelation of which Christ is the fulfillment" (CCC 66).

Pope St. John Paul II expressed this enduring truth in "Veritatis Splendor": "The Church's moral teaching is not an arbitrary imposition; it is a reflection of the truth of the human person revealed in Christ." In other words, truth itself does not change – but our hearts must be continually converted to it.

## The growth of understanding: Development, not replacement

While the truths of faith do not change, our understanding of them can and must grow. St. John Henry Newman, proclaimed a doctor of the Church by Pope Leo XIV on Nov. 1, 2025, described this process in his classic work, "An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine," "In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below, to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often."

The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed this insight, "The Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on" (Dei Verbum, 8).

This means that doctrine does not evolve in its essence, but our comprehension of it matures through prayer, study and experience. Over the centuries, this dynamic has guided the Church's teaching – from the early Christological debates of the Councils to social encyclicals like "Rerum Novarum" and "Laudato Si'," which applied perennial moral principles to the questions of industrialization and ecology.

Development, in the Catholic sense, is not innovation detached from truth; it is growth rooted in fidelity. It allows the Church to speak the eternal Word of God in a language each generation can understand.

## The nature of true change: Conversion, not innovation

The Church's understanding of change is captured by a single word: conversion. In "The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community," the Congregation for the Clergy makes clear that the transformation the Church seeks is first and foremost spiritual. "Pastoral conversion," it says, "is not simply about organizational restructuring, but about an interior transformation that leads to renewed missionary zeal."

This is a crucial distinction. The Church does not change to keep up with the world; she changes to remain faithful to her mission in the world. True change begins not in structures or strategies but in hearts – when believers allow the Holy Spirit to renew their encounter with Christ and inspire them to share that encounter with others.

"The parish is not an outdated institution," the document insists, "because it possesses great flexibility." What needs reform, therefore, is not the essence of the parish but its energy, its missionary outlook. The call to "pastoral conversion" is a call to move from maintenance to mission, from passive reception to active discipleship.

*"Pastoral conversion is not simply about organizational restructuring, but about an interior transformation that leads to renewed missionary zeal."*

## **Change in the service of mission**

Every authentic reform in the Church serves one goal: evangelization. The Pastoral Conversion document situates all change in the context of the Church's missionary identity: "The reform of parish structures should be put in the context of missionary conversion."

The parish is not simply an administrative unit but "a community of communities," a living cell in the Body of Christ that proclaims the Gospel to its surroundings. The instruction calls for creativity in responding to changing circumstances – urbanization, mobility, digital culture – without losing sight of the parish's core purpose: to be a home of the Word, the Eucharist and charity.

This perspective echoes Pope Francis's call in "Evangelii Gaudium," "The Church is called to be permanently in a state of mission." Change, when animated by mission, becomes a sign of vitality rather than instability. The Spirit leads the Church not into confusion but into new forms of witness.

## **The parish as a living organism**

In one of its most evocative passages, the Pastoral Conversion document describes the parish as a "living organism" capable of adaptation and growth. A living organism remains itself while continually changing – responding to new needs, regenerating what has grown weak and healing what has been wounded.

This image reveals the Church's theology of continuity. A living Church is not static; she breathes with the life of the Spirit. Change, in this sense, is not opposition to tradition but its proper expression. Tradition literally means "to hand on." The Church hands on the faith by living it anew in each generation.

A healthy parish, therefore, is one that is rooted in the sacraments and Scripture yet responsive to the needs of the local community. It listens, accompanies and serves – always pointing beyond itself to Christ.

## **Discernment: Guarding authentic change**

The Church's openness to change is never uncritical. The same instruction warns against confusing pastoral creativity with mere innovation. "Pastoral conversion," it says, "does not consist in the simple renewal of structures, but in the renewal of faith and of the Christian life itself."

Authentic change always requires discernment – a careful listening to the Holy Spirit and to the lived reality of the people of God. Discernment protects the Church from two opposite errors: rigidity that resists renewal and relativism that compromises truth.

As St. Paul wrote, “Test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). This process of discernment, guided by the Magisterium, ensures that change serves communion and holiness, not division or confusion.

Pope Benedict XVI expressed the same idea in “Caritas in Veritate,” “Truth preserves and expresses itself in love; to the extent that we detach ourselves from truth, we endanger authentic human development.” In short, change that is faithful must always be anchored in truth and charity together.

### Change as hope and holiness

“Behold,  
I make  
all things  
new.”

Revelation 21:5

Ultimately, the Church’s vision of change is rooted in hope. Christians believe in a God who declares, “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5). Change, when guided by grace, becomes a participation in God’s ongoing work of renewal in creation and in the Church.

The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community document reminds believers that the Church’s future depends not on perfect programs but on holy people. When parishes embrace conversion, they become places of encounter, community and mission – signs of God’s Kingdom in a restless world.

This is the deepest meaning of change in the Catholic tradition: transformation into holiness. The call is not merely to adjust structures or modernize language but to let Christ renew the Church from within. As the Catechism teaches, “Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life” (CCC 1431).

### Conclusion: A Church that changes to remain faithful

The Catholic Church views change not as a break from her past, but as a deepening of her fidelity to Christ. The truth does not change, but the Church must continually be converted so that she can proclaim that truth more fully and live it more convincingly.

So, what does this mean for us in this moment of renewal in the Diocese of St. Cloud? The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community offers a blueprint for this renewal – calling every parish and believer to missionary discipleship, spiritual conversion and pastoral creativity. In doing so, it echoes the heart of the Gospel itself: change is not to be feared when it leads to love.

In a world where change often breeds anxiety, the Church offers a paradoxical comfort: we are called to change precisely because God does not. The unchanging Lord is always making His Church new – not by discarding what came before, but by perfecting it in holiness.

# PART ONE

## Foundations of Accompaniment

### THE THEOLOGY OF ACCOMPANIMENT

*By Kristin Molitor, a native of Rockville and an occasional writer for The Central Minnesota Catholic*

In 2013, Pope Francis released “*Evangelii Gaudium*” (The Joy of the Gospel). In this bold and inspiring document, he sent the entire Church on mission, calling her to live out her deepest identity: to evangelize.

The Church exists to be a light to the nations, to draw every person, every soul, into a living relationship with Jesus Christ. Pope Francis reminds us that “All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization” (EG, 120). For this reason, he gave us the powerful phrase “missionary disciple,” expressing both our call to follow Jesus as his disciples and to share him with others as missionaries.

Pope Francis emphasizes that an essential way for missionary disciples to live out their call to evangelize is through accompaniment, walking alongside others as they journey toward a deeper relationship with Jesus. He writes: “The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this ‘art of accompaniment’ which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other” (cf. Ex 3:5; EG, 169).

Although Pope Francis highlights the need for accompaniment with new urgency, accompaniment is not a novelty or a “buzzword” in the Church. From the beginning, the Church has understood accompaniment to be foundational for the authentic reception of the Gospel, genuine spiritual encounter, growth in holiness and the building up of Christian community.

This is because Christianity is, at its core, relational. We come to know Jesus most deeply in and through our relationships with others. Faith grows most powerfully in the context of human relationships.

As St. John Paul II taught in his teaching “Theology of the Body,” “Man becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion” (St. John Paul II, General Audience, November 14, 1979). Created in the image of the Triune God, who is himself a communion of persons, we, too, are made for communion. We are made for relationships. We are made for love.

To live in communion is to share our hearts with another. At the core of accompaniment lies the human heart – the sacred space where God dwells, the holy ground of each person. When Pope Francis urges us to “remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other,” he calls us to reverence, to approach every individual with humility,

tenderness and love, recognizing their unique, unrepeatable worth and their singular revelation of God.

Accompaniment moves us from a Church culture of transaction to one of transformation, from resources to relationships and from processes to people. Too often, we rely on websites, pamphlets or programs to answer questions about Jesus and the Church without taking the time to engage the deeper places of someone's heart. True accompaniment goes beyond sharing knowledge; it is the practice of reverencing and receiving the human heart, fostering genuine growth and transformation.

In his encyclical "Dilexit Nos," Pope Francis calls us to return to the heart: "Instead of running after superficial satisfactions ... we would do better to think about the really important questions in life. Who am I, really? What am I looking for? What direction do I want to give to my life, my decisions and my actions? Why and for what purpose am I in this world? How do I want to look back on my life once it ends? What meaning do I want to give to all my experiences? Who do I want to be for others? Who am I for God? All these questions lead us back to the heart" (Dilexit Nos, 8).

These questions of the heart can be shared in accompaniment, where they can be asked and received. When missionary disciples walk with others in love, reverence and understanding, they help those they accompany become all that God has created them to be.

Accompaniment is especially urgent today.

We live in a world starved for authentic relationships. Our digital culture gives the illusion of connection, while often fostering disconnection. We can send snaps, texts and post stories without ever revealing our true selves, without revealing our hearts. We are tethered together, yet without the demands of relationship, without the demands of love.

Meanwhile, the New Evangelization has gifted us with an abundance of catechetical resources – from podcasts to programs to YouTube videos – but these resources are not enough. Faith is not meant to be lived in isolation, earbuds in, consuming Catholic content alone. The Gospel is meant to be shared, our faith lived in communion, our hearts given and received in love.

This is the heart of missionary discipleship: the heart itself. Through accompaniment, Christ continues his mission through us. When we revere and receive the hearts entrusted to us, people encounter Jesus in a real and tangible way – through the love of Christ dwelling within our own hearts. Here, missionary discipleship finds its fullest expression: making Christ present through the gift of ourselves, creating bonds of love, holy communion with Christ and with one another.

## LISTENING AS A WAY OF BEING CHURCH

*By Daniella Zsupan-Jerome, assistant professor of pastoral theology, Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary*

In sacred art, we sometimes see icons of St. Benedict holding an open book, with the Latin words “ausculta” (listen) and “per venies” (you will arrive) on the two open pages.

Traditionally, these are the very first and very last words of The Rule of St. Benedict, a short document that describes the way of life in community for monastics. In a simple and profound way, put side by side, these words summarize the overall wisdom of this tradition, “Listen, and you will arrive.” Anything that is said in between points to this greater truth.

Listening is essential for community life. We know this is true in all social aspects of our lives: for good marriages, for healthy families, for functional work environments, for winning sports teams. We have heard this in our Church, too, especially in recent years of the Synod on Synodality, which described the Church particularly as “a listening Church” for this essential, reflective work of being present to the world today.

Listening matters for life and for faith. What does the Church teach about listening? Our theological tradition offers some fundamental insights.

### 1. Listening as essential to faith.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church highlights listening as integral to our obedience of faith: “To obey (from the Latin ‘ob-audire,’ to ‘hear or listen to’) in faith is to submit freely to the word that has been heard” (CCC 144). This means that listening is essential to our ability to receive and respond to God’s Word, God’s self-gift to us in love. Our listening in this sense is an inner disposition of spirit, a hospitality we extend to God, a way of welcome to be in relationship with God. Because it is a way for us to enter into relationship with God, God desires our listening. Along these lines, we are invited at the Transfiguration: “This is my beloved Son, listen to him” (Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7, Luke 9:35). We see this obedience in faith also echoed by the Blessed Mother at the Wedding at Cana: “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5).

### 2. Listening and life.

In the 2010 post-synodal exhortation “Verbum Domini” (“On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church”), Pope Benedict XVI offers a profound extended reflection on God’s Word, and what it means for our faith, for the Church and for the broader world. In this document he teaches about listening not only as an internal movement of faith, but also as something fundamental for shaping how we live. “Listening to the word of God leads us first and foremost to value the need to live in accordance with this law ‘written on human hearts’” (9). Like the Catechism, Pope Benedict XVI also lifts up the

example of Mary, who “also symbolizes openness to God and others; an active listening which interiorizes and assimilates, one in which the word becomes a way of life” (27). For Pope Benedict XVI, listening goes beyond our way of welcome to God’s Word. More than that, listening also forms us to live according to God’s Word. Listening draws us closer to God and deepens our potential for a godly life. When we listen, we welcome not only the Word but welcome our transformation by it. As Church, listening should transform us and move us to faithful action: “Listening with docility to the word of God in the Church awakens ‘charity and justice towards all, especially towards the poor’” (103). We live differently if we listen.

### **3. Listening and community.**

In “*Verbum Domini*,” Pope Benedict XVI also connects listening to God’s Word to being a community of faith: “Listening to the word of God introduces and increases ecclesial communion with all those who walk by faith” (30). We see this as well with Pope Francis, who in 2022 dedicated that year’s World Communication’s Day Message to “Listening with the Ear of the Heart.” In this reflection he emphasizes the relational impact of listening: “Therefore, when seeking true communication, the first type of listening to be rediscovered is listening to oneself, to one’s truest needs, those inscribed in each person’s inmost being. And we can only start by listening to what makes us unique in creation: the desire to be in relationship with others and with the Other. We are not made to live like atoms, but together.” Listening is the avenue that brings us into authentic relationship with all that is beyond ourselves: others, the created world, God. Without the ability to listen, we turn inward in self-referential isolation.

In contrast, when we listen, it is the pathway to others, to community and communion.

For the Church, the concept of listening captures the foundation for our inner response of faith to God, as well as the outward movement to others by way of a godly life. If we lead with listening, we will indeed arrive – arrive at a sense of communion with others and God.

## MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP IN PRACTICE

One of the hardest things for us to come to grips with is that change happens with or without us. For thousands of years, writers and philosophers have been trying to help us understand this aspect of our life. Plato wrote, "You could not step twice into the same river." Ecclesiastes 3:1 states "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens," highlighting the cyclical and changing nature of life's events.

We cannot stop the flow of the river or the changing of the seasons; our efforts can be better spent deciding how we can take advantage of this change.

As baptized Catholics, we are called to be more than passive participants in our faith; we are invited to be active agents of change, carrying forward the evangelizing mission of the Church. This is not an abstract ideal, but a living call rooted in the Gospel and brought to life in our parishes, families and communities.

Being an agent of change means embracing this identity. It's a role that asks us to step outside of comfort zones and engage deeply with the needs of our communities.

(Excerpted from "Agents of change: Stepping forward in faith" by Jon Ruis, January 2025, The Central Minnesota Catholic)

### IDEAS FOR PASTORAL LEADERS:

Here are ways leaders can foster service and renewal:

- **Model servant leadership**

Lead by example. Show humility in decision-making, transparency in communication and compassion in pastoral care. People follow what they see.

- **Create opportunities for ownership**

Invite parishioners to take responsibility for ministries, events and outreach. Shared leadership builds resilience and trust.

- **Equip and empower**

Offer training for volunteers, mentorship for emerging leaders and spiritual formation for all. Equip people not just to serve, but to serve well. Partner with neighboring communities to share time and resources.

- **Name the grief, but point to hope**

Acknowledge losses openly, whether it's a closed parish or a beloved tradition. Then cast vision for what new life can look like.

- **Encourage collaboration across ACCs**

Help parishes see themselves not as competitors but as partners in mission. Shared resources and shared ministry strengthen the whole body.

- **Celebrate service publicly**

Recognize volunteers, highlight ministries and tell stories of impact. Celebration inspires others to step forward.

## IDEAS FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEWS:

- **Show up with purpose**

Don't just attend Mass – prepare for it. Read the Scriptures ahead of time, pray for your parish community and ask God to show you who might need encouragement that day.

- **Practice radical hospitality**

Greet newcomers, sit with someone alone, invite a family to coffee and donuts. Small acts of welcome can change someone's experience of Church.

- **Serve in simple, concrete ways**

Volunteer as a catechist, lector or choir member. Help clean the parish hall. Offer rides to those who can't get to Mass. Missionary discipleship is lived in ordinary service.

- **Share your faith story**

Talk about how God has worked in your life. Share a moment of grace with a friend or fellow parishioner. Witness doesn't require a microphone.

- **Step into the margins**

Visit the sick, bring meals to families in crisis, support local outreach ministries. Missionary disciples go where the need is greatest.

- **Pray for renewal**

Make intercession part of your daily rhythm. Pray for your parish, your pastor and those struggling with change. Prayer is the engine of mission.

# PART TWO

## Pastoral care in times of grief and transition

### THE THEOLOGY OF GRIEF

*By Deacon John Wocken*

Grief is a profoundly human experience – one that touches every person at some point in life.

It arrives as a response to loss, particularly the death of a loved one, or an event or a special relationship. It is often marked by sorrow, confusion, anger and loneliness.

In these vulnerable moments, the Catholic Church offers a rich treasury of wisdom, rooted in Sacred Scripture and tradition, to guide and console the grieving heart. Here are some resources and what they offer us on the topic of grief.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church acknowledges the deep suffering caused by death or loss, describing it as the “end of earthly life” but also as a passage toward eternal life (CCC 1007).

Though death is a natural part of life, it remains a mystery that confronts us with our limitations and the fragility of existence. Yet, our faith teaches us that death does not have the final word. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, the bonds of death have been broken. As St. Paul declares, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor 15:55).

The Order of Christian Funerals, the Church’s liturgy for the dead, proclaims this victory and offers profound hope to the grieving. The opening prayer of the funeral Mass speaks to the heart: “Indeed for your faithful, Lord, life is changed, not ended.”

This truth is central to Catholic teaching. While the pain of separation is real, it is not without purpose or end. Through the Paschal Mystery – Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection – we are promised that those who die in Christ will rise with him.

Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation “*Evangelii Gaudium*,” reminds us that “the joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus.” Even amid grief, Christians are not without hope. Our sorrow is transformed – not erased – by the love of Christ who entered fully into human suffering. Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35), not because He lacked faith in the resurrection, but because he shared in the pain of loss. This moment reveals God’s solidarity with our grief and loss. The Incarnate Word knows our pain intimately and walks with us in it.

Church tradition also invites us to see grief as a time for spiritual growth. In “*Gaudium et Spes*,” the Second Vatican Council describes suffering as having the power to “purify the heart” and lead one closer to God (GS 22). Grief, painful as it is, can be a sacred space where we encounter God in a new and transformative way. It is in our brokenness that we often learn how deeply we are loved, both by God and by the community of faith.

The Church also recognizes the importance of mourning within a community. We are not meant to grieve alone. The Body of Christ – our parish, family and friends – are called to support those who mourn, just as Mary was supported by the beloved disciple at the foot of the Cross (John 19:26-27). Offering a listening ear, a prayer, or even just our presence can be a profound act of mercy toward the grieving.

Catholic tradition also urges us to pray for the dead. The Catechism teaches that praying for the souls in purgatory is a “holy and pious thought” (2 Maccabees 12:45; CCC 1032). Far from being a passive or futile act, intercessory prayer unites us with our departed loved ones through the communion of saints. Our grief becomes a channel of grace when it moves us to pray for their purification and entry into eternal joy.

Finally, the Church offers Mary, Mother of Sorrows, as our model and intercessor. She stood by the Cross of her Son, enduring a grief no parent should bear. Yet she never abandoned her faith. In her, we see that faith and sorrow can coexist, and that trust in God does not eliminate pain, but transforms it. When we are overwhelmed, we can turn to her with confidence, knowing she holds our suffering close to her heart. In the end, the Catholic vision of grief is one of hope rooted in the Resurrection.

While we mourn, we do not mourn as those without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). We look forward to the day when God “will wipe away every tear,” and “death shall be no more” (Revelation 21:4).

Until then, we journey in faith, clinging to the promises of Christ, supported by the prayers of the Church and awaiting the eternal reunion promised to all who love him.

Catholic theology of grief is grounded in the belief that Christ is present in suffering and that while grief is natural and painful, it is not without hope. It is seen as a “sacred space” to encounter God, supported by community and prayer, and transformed by the hope of Christ’s Resurrection and ever-present love. The church emphasizes communal mourning, and finding new life in loss, without negating the pain of the grief and grieving process.

A few key aspects of our theology of grief include:

- **Grief as a sacred space:** Grief is viewed not as something to be overcome, but as a painful yet sacred space to encounter God and experience His love more deeply. This sacred space holds the potential for transformation and that without creating space for grief, we are susceptible instead to it eroding us or causing increased and undue suffering.
- **We grieve with hope:** Similar to the loss of a loved one, the grief experienced with change also holds hope of the new life to come. Through the incarnation, God chose to walk among all our pain and darkness, and Christ’s love has the power to transcend darkness.
- **The presence of Christ:** Christ meets us in our grief, offering comfort, strength, and healing. This is a source of hope, especially in moments of darkness or weakness, where his grace is made perfect.
- **Finding renewal in loss:** The process of grieving can lead to new forms of community, service, and prayer. The theme “All Things New” signifies that God is always planting seeds of renewal, and even in grief, there is a promise of a new future in Christ. This hope is articulated in the funeral mass, which states that “life is changed, not ended”. This belief can and ought to be translated into other forms of grief, including in parish life.
- **The role of the community:** The community of faith is called to support those who grieve by offering a listening ear, prayer, and presence. Calling upon our belief in grief as a sacred space, we are reminded as community that we are not present to one another to “fix” another’s grief or do away with it. We are simply there as witnesses to it and companions on the difficult journey.

## UNDERSTANDING GRIEF IN PARISH LIFE

Many of the most profound experiences of grief in life do not arise *from* death, but from change. Moments such as a family member's marriage, the birth of a child, or a transition in vocation can stir a deep sense of loss. While no life is lost in these situations, something familiar often is – the relationship as it once was, the dream of how things might unfold, or the comfort of a known environment and rhythm. These experiences remind us that every change, even one that holds promise, carries with it an element of letting go. For those guiding faith communities through seasons of transition, acknowledging this grief is not a sign of weakness but an act of pastoral care – honoring the sacred work of loss and renewal that accompanies all change.

While grief is often thought of in terms of the loss of a life, it is critical that we acknowledge that grief does not just pertain to “loss,” but more broadly, is about change.

Change is not new to the Catholic Church – as a Pilgrim Church, believers have been called to journey towards the new throughout the centuries. Our theology of grief reminds us that we grieve all changes with hope, and as we honor our past, we can see evidence of Christ's ever-present help through change.

However, holding hope does not mean there will not be pain, does not mean that there will not or should not be grief.

With the All Things New planning process, there will be change. In fact, if done well, no parish or **ACC will be un-changed!** All ACC's are looking at the guiding principles and making changes to better live them out, to be mission-driven and ministry-focused. Some of these changes will be well-received, while others may not. There will be grief, even around the most beautiful and purposeful changes.

Meanwhile, some church buildings will close, or parish identities may be lost in closures or mergers. Yet, even for parishes that are not closing or merging, community members there will be called to welcome new people whose Mass times were changed or parish buildings were closed. And those new worshipers and members will bring along with them their grief from the losses or changes they are experiencing. How will we receive them? How will we help them carry their grief? \*

Additionally, new parishioners may sit in our pew, or move our coffee pot. While we joke about these seemingly simple things in our church communities, the reality is that they too are a change that can add to one's grief of larger-scale changes being experienced. These are also things that could spark our own grief simply by changing the dynamics we have come to expect. How will we handle these changes? How might we acknowledge our own potential grief that will come with the changes of welcoming new community members?

There will be other losses aside from parishes or buildings as well – new pastors may still come every July 1, Mass times may continue to change, our sense of security or familiarity are likely to be shaken. How might this bring about grief for you? For others? How will we collectively recognize, honor and help carry this sure and certain grief in the coming months and years?

These are questions we invite all ACC's to consider and explore together. On page 19 are some resources and ideas that may be helpful for leadership within ACC's, and others that are applicable to all of the faithful as we journey through change together, knowing that in it all, there will be grief.

*\*See: Hospitality/Accompaniment section on page 26 for more on welcoming new members.*

## UNDERSTANDING GRIEF RESPONSES

It is a common misconception that grief goes through a linear, or timebound, “process.” There is no deadline for grief, no timeline for when it may first rear its head nor when it will end. In fact, most research and lived experience tells us that grief does not “end.” (See image from [Whats your Grief - A Grief Website for the Rest of Us](#) for a depiction of the understanding that grief does not diminish with time, but rather that we learn how to cope and live with our grief).



Grief Response	What You May Notice	Example in Parish Life/All Things New
Denial	Disbelief that the loss has occurred.	<p>"I don't know why we need to change, we're doing fine as we are."</p> <p>"We're not going to submit a plan and see what happens."</p>
Anger	Frustration and rage that can be directed at oneself, others, or the situation.	<p>"This is the diocese's fault! They don't understand our parish, and they're destroying our legacy!"</p> <p>"This is X's fault, they should have been thinking about this 20 years ago."</p>
Bargaining	Attempts to negotiate a way out of the pain or loss, often involving "if only" statements.	<p>"If only we could commit to increasing our pledges by 20% next year, then they would let us keep our building open, and we wouldn't have to merge."</p> <p>"How strong are they going to hold to the parameters, is there any wiggle room?"</p>
Depression/Sorrow	Feelings of sadness, emptiness, even despair.	<p>"I've put my whole life into this church, and now it's all ending. What's the point of even trying to go to church anymore?"</p>
Acceptance	Coming to terms with the reality of the loss and finding a way to move forward.	<p>"It's sad to say goodbye to our old ways, but I see how combining our resources with the neighboring parish can help us create a stronger, more sustainable ministry for the future."</p> <p>"I go to Mass at other parishes half the time lately anyways; I guess the Spirit was preparing me for this change."</p>

The responses on page 15 come from what was formerly referred to as the “Five Stages of Grief,” based on the research of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. However, we now understand that there are not in fact “stages” that one moves through in a linear or defined way. These various responses may occur simultaneously, some may never present themselves, others may re-occur at various times or cycle through any number of them over the course of years. Grief is complex. It is also unique to each person. Remember that these responses offer us a framework to help identify and understand the feelings that may accompany one’s grief, not as a strict timeline or model for how to grieve.

## BEST PRACTICES: SPIRITUAL APPROACHES AND COMPANIONING TOOLS

Our job as ACC leaders and people of faith is not to control grief within our faith communities. It is not to try to avoid or do away with it. We cannot “fix” the natural and holy process of grieving changes – be they welcomed or unexpected. Our role is to accompany one another through grief. We recall the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), who were so bereaved by all that had happened that they did not even recognize Jesus as he approached them. And we recall Jesus, who simply walked with them until they did. Below are some best practices, including some pitfalls to avoid and tools to embrace, as you journey with those grieving changes in parish life, as well as additional resources that may be helpful to you as a leader or to share with those in your faith community.

### Avoid Common Pitfalls (Unhelpful Responses):

- **Defensiveness** (“We have communicated about changes for years; parishes have had time to adapt.”)
- **Shaming** (“As the body of Christ, we should...”)
- **Faking “fine” or diminishing the loss** (“It’ll be alright; you’ll see.” “You’ll be fine; someday we’ll laugh about this.” “It’s not that big a deal.” “I feel fine with the changes” - if you really don’t)
- **Spinning their response** (“You say that you won’t attend church, but I think in the future you will.” “Maybe you won’t give money now, but you could once we get through this.”)
- **Making it about us** (“I think this is needed; I am fine with the changes.; I like this part of the plan”). It’s okay to share our perspective, if the time is right and the motivation is pure; but avoid shaming or appearing self-righteous (ie. “See how well I’m dealing with this.”)
- **Note:** There might be a time or place for some of the above responses, but generally the beginning of a conversation or when someone is immersed in the grieving process is not that time or place. Now is the time to **Listen**.

### Tips for supportive listening:

- Think about the ways you know that someone is listening to you. Use those cues to help others know you are listening. Examples: Body language (arms uncrossed, eye contact, open posture leaning in, versus away); restating (“I hear you say...”); noticing emotions (“I am sensing a lot of sadness around what you’re sharing”); clarifying (“I wonder...” or “I’m curious about your comment...”); making connections (“this sounds a little like what X said about Y, am I getting that right?”)
- Respond with empathy and honor their emotions. A response as simple as “that sounds hard” or “I can imagine that would be challenging” can honor someone’s struggle regardless of your own thoughts around it. Perhaps add, “Can you help me understand more what this experience has been like for you?”

- Listening without reacting. Start by recognizing your own emotions. This is likely a topic close to your heart, so you will have emotions about it. That's ok. But if we are in a listening role, we need to save processing those emotions for a debrief time and focus on listening to the emotions of the other in this moment. If it helps, recognize your emotion, maybe even name it in your mind, before returning your mind to the others' sharing.
- Acknowledge when our emotions have played a role in what we say. This will happen. Simply acknowledge and ask for forgiveness. Model the behavior we want to see in others and return to our listening being about the others' sharing.
- Know and honor your boundaries. While others are entitled to their own grief response, you also have the right to feel safe and can let someone know when their communication style is overly aggressive or blaming. Recognize if and when you may not be in a place to listen, and let someone know that you really want to listen, but are not in a good place to do so well; then set-up another time when you can be more present to their need to share and honoring your own boundaries.

#### **Additional Reminders:**

- Don't take someone's grief response personally - it's not about you; it's about the change and their loss.
- You do not need to defend changes or counter statements someone may make to you as part of their grief response. Just listen.
- Be authentic, not scripted. Internalize, **not memorize** some of the helpful responses noted above.
- Remember, there is nothing to fix! Grief is ok and grief responses are a natural and holy part of our journey. Offer simple presence.
- If needed, bring in an outside person to do support for your community. Contact the diocese or Mental Health Ministry team for those experienced in this area.

## GROWING THROUGH CHANGE: GRIEF RESOURCES

Grief is the response to a loss or separation from someone or something that held great meaning for you. Significant change, including the loss of place, is unique and it's important to understand how people might respond to that grief. Often, one of the trickiest things is that change is not always perceived as a loss, even to the person who is going through it. Therefore, the responses tend to be varied and sometimes shrouded in an additional layer of shame or guilt over having such a response. Fear and anxiety over the unknown, or anticipatory grief, is a common experience of change. Below are tips and resources for coping with grief, helping to manage fear and providing leadership.

### Coping with Grief

**Tips** for listening with heart to those who are experiencing grief:

- Avoid pitfalls such as: defensiveness, shaming, faking fine, spinning their response to something positive ("At least..."), or making it about yourself.
- Remember the basics of listening and caring skills: reflecting back what they say to you, check-in to make sure you understand correctly, validate emotions and affirm that any way they are feeling is accepted (create psychological safety by assuring them it's safe to feel that way).

### Resources

- Priya Parker gives practical suggestions and additional resources for working with collective grief. <https://www.priyaparker.com/art-of-gathering-newsletter/grieve-together-now>
- **Whats your Grief - A Grief Website for the Rest of Us** <https://whatsyourgrief.com/>
- Healing Grounds: One-on-One Grief support for all types of loss (320-493-8472).
- Local resources, such as Center for Life Transitions in St. Cloud, offer regular grief share events. If St. Cloud is out of reach for your community, you're encouraged to look for more local resources. Please reach out if you need help finding them. <https://www.thecenterforlifetransitions.org/>
- The Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers offers a grief support page: <https://catholicmhm.org/grief-support>
- Many parishes have grief support or accompaniment ministries, such as Stephen Ministries, Redbird Ministries or other bereavement groups. Reach out!

### Managing Fear

**Tips** for coping with fear and anxiety:

- Recognize symptoms of anxiety: excessive worry, edginess, fatigue, sleep difficulty, etc.
- Accept that you cannot control everything; identify the things that you can control.
- Encourage attention to physical needs (exercise, a healthy diet and good sleep practices).
- Make connections with your closest relationships and talk about your experience.

### Resource

This short video discusses empathy around the fear of change. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCJOM8WBe5c>

## Leading Through Change

### Tips for Leading Through Change:

- Focus on reducing uncertainty by being a clear, honest and timely communicator. When people hear no news, they assume the worst. Be accessible to people as much as possible. Provide direction, encouraging an optimistic focus on solutions rather than problems.
- Utilize rituals to help create a sense of structure and safety.
- Bring in outside support persons if needed to help.

### Resources

- **Managing Transition** with Patrick Lencioni clarifies how change is not what's challenging, it's the internal psychological process that people go through during times of transition that is hard. <https://vimeo.com/171578804>
- Recognize the **Six Central Needs of Mourning**, and assess if and how your faith community is making space for these needs around parish changes. <https://www.centerforloss.com/grief/six-needs-mourning/>
- This **Our Sunday Visitor** article shares 6 helpful tips for healing after parish mergers or closures, based on other dioceses' experiences with substantial change. <https://www.oursundayvisitor.com/how-to-heal-after-your-parish-merges-or-closes/>
- The **Kubler-Ross Change Curve** is a framework for understanding the emotional journey people experience during times of change. <https://www.oursundayvisitor.com/how-to-heal-after-your-parish-merges-or-closes/>

# PART THREE

## Hospitality

### THE THEOLOGY OF HOSPITALITY

*By Benedictine Sister Nina Lasceski*

When I was in high school, I really loved to do homework. Well, maybe not all my homework, as I was not particularly good at mathematics. Yet, I did my best to strive ahead, making mistakes along the way and learning from them.

As I spent what seemed like hours trying to solve math problems, I realized in order to better understand math, I needed to find ways to think about it differently.

In preparation for the writing of this article about what the Church teaches about hospitality, I needed once again to do homework. And what did I learn? Lots.

There are several places to find biblical references to hospitality in the Bible:

- Matthew 25:35 says, "...for I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me."
- Galatians 6:10 instructs, "So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith."

The Rule of Benedict highlights the above verses in Chapter 53:1, "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ...". As a Benedictine, I have read this verse many times and often hear it read before our community morning prayer. It always challenges me to think about situations at work or home when guests have shown up at an inopportune moment. How have I reacted to their visit? If I did not handle things well, what could I have done differently? By doing a little more homework, I found another New Testament reading to help guide me for the next time this might happen:

- Romans 12: 10-13 tells us, "Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."

Sometimes before doing homework, we need a vision. It helps to get us through. In 2023, Bishop Patrick Neary introduced seven priorities for the St. Cloud Diocese, one of them being strategic planning for the Area Catholic Communities. Homework on this priority has begun and parishioners across the diocese are now together learning new ways to show hospitality to one another.

Studying together and listening to each other can and is making a difference. When hearing points of view that differ from your own, do your best to welcome them. This is what hospitality is all about. Slowly and carefully, transformation is underway.

Whenever I got frustrated with a math problem, I would review what I did know. I noted my strengths and with those strengths did my best to proceed. I knew that I would make mistakes, and sometimes fail, but that was when I learned the most.

There may be times when you are called to engage in different ways within your ACC. When doing this, remember that you may encounter others you don't know. Do your best to welcome them. Welcome them as Christ, as you never know how much your hospitality may make a difference to them.

Basketball great Michael Jordan once said, "I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life, and that is why I succeed." Hockey player Wayne Gretzky says it best when he notes, "You miss 100% of the shots you don't take."

Offering hospitality can be a risk. Attempts to show hospitality may bring mistakes and failures, yet there will be triumphs, too. As the ACC journey continues, prayer, reflection and sharing are key. Oh, and there may be a bit of homework involved!

## HOSPITALITY: FOSTERING FELLOWSHIP AND BELONGING

If you have ever joined a new parish, you know that it can sometimes be a difficult experience. You may have filled out the registration form and now receive the giving envelopes in the mail, but have you been asked to become part of the community in other ways? Or has anyone even said hello to you? Invited you to coffee and donuts after Mass? Let you know where the bathroom was? It can be hard to become part of a new community.

Now imagine you have become part of a new parish because your beloved church has closed. You may not want to be part of the new parish because you are still grieving the loss. And on top of that, no one welcomes you to your new parish.

This doesn't mean that it is a bad parish community or that it is full of unkind people, it's just not something that people are always great at. Sometimes it is hard to step out of our comfort zone and greet the stranger among us. So how do we step out of our comfort zone.

Welcoming new parishioners after their church has closed is a deeply pastoral moment that calls for compassion, hospitality and intentional community-building. Here are several thoughtful and pastoral ways to do this:

### 1. Personal Outreach

- Pastoral Visit or Call: Have the pastor or a member of the pastoral team personally reach out to each family. A phone call, handwritten note or home visit can go a long way in making them feel seen and valued.
- Welcome Team: Assign a small group of parishioners to serve as a "welcome committee" to greet and accompany new members during their first few weeks.

### 2. Liturgical Acknowledgment

- Welcome Blessing at Mass: Include a special welcome and blessing during a Sunday Mass. This can be done with sensitivity, acknowledging the grief of losing a former parish while celebrating the new community.
- Prayer of the Faithful: Include intentions for the closing parish and its members during Mass.

### 3. Community Integration

- Welcome Reception: Host a casual gathering like a coffee hour, potluck or brunch where new and existing parishioners can meet and share stories, making sure that people are not sitting with the usual people, but a mix of new and existing parishioners. Perhaps have a host at each table who can help make connections and share stories.

- **Story Sharing:** Create a space (either in-person or in the bulletin/website) where new members can share memories of their former parish and what it meant to them.
- **Small Faith-Sharing Groups:** Hosting bible studies, seasonal reflection groups or book groups in casual settings can help to deepen relationships.
- **Memory Book or Wall:** Create a space where people can leave photos, stories or mementos from their former parish.

#### 4. Ministry Involvement

- **Invitation to Serve:** Personally invite new parishioners to participate in ministries or groups that align with their gifts and interests.
- **Mentorship Pairing:** Pair new families with long-time parishioners who can help them navigate the new community.

#### 5. Ongoing Support

- **Grief Support:** Offer pastoral counseling or a support group for those grieving the loss of their former parish.
- **Listening Sessions:** Hold open forums where new members can express their hopes, concerns and ideas for the future.
- **Accompany Each Other:** Walk with individuals in their journey, listening without judgement or the need to fix.

## CELEBRATING MILESTONES AND PROGRESS

The closing and merging of parishes involve many feelings and emotions, not unlike those experienced at a funeral. Drawing upon the three-fold funeral liturgy, the Diocesan Liturgical Commission is developing a three-fold liturgical ritual for those parishes who will experience closing and merging.

### **1. Liturgy of Loss and Hope**

A ritual of remembering, done prior to the scheduled Closing Liturgy; much like a Funeral Vigil Service, this ritual allows various options of involving parishioners and stories of remembrance. (This is not a Mass.)

### **2. Eucharistic Liturgy with Closing Ritual**

The Closing Liturgy will be presided by the bishop. It will normally be done on the last Sunday Mass celebrated in the building. As part of the closing ritual, the bishop and presider will lead prayer at various stations in the church to remember their role in the prayer life of the community. Various items that will be taken to the new location are processed out, along with the Blessed Sacrament.

### **3. Welcoming Eucharistic Liturgy**

Guidance and prayers are being developed to assist parishes with rituals to welcome those whose parishes are to be closed.

Members of the Diocesan Liturgical Commission look forward to sharing the developed resources and helping the parishes experiencing closing and/or mergers with planning the appropriate rituals.

Please note: The commission will work with parishes before disposing of property to go over requirements for religious articles

For more information, contact the diocesan worship office.

## BEST PRACTICES: SHARED IDEAS AND EFFECTIVE METHODS

Here are best practices for accompaniment in Catholic ministry, deeply rooted in Pope Francis's teachings and pastoral documents like *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Amoris Laetitia*. These practices can guide parish leaders, catechists and lay ministers in fostering meaningful relationships that reflect Christ's presence:

### 1. Begin with Reverence for the Other

"Remove your sandals before the sacred ground of the other." – *Evangelii Gaudium*, 169[1]

- Approach each person with humility and respect.
- See the person not as a project or problem, but as a beloved child of God.
- Honor their story, wounds and gifts.

### 2. Listen Deeply and Compassionately

- Practice active listening—not just hearing, but being fully present.
- Avoid rushing to fix, correct or advise.
- Create safe spaces for people to share doubts, hopes and struggles.

### 3. Walk at Their Pace

- Accompaniment is gradual and patient.
- Respect where someone is on their journey of faith.
- Avoid imposing timelines or expectations; instead, offer steady encouragement.

### 4. Foster Encounter and Relationship

- Build trust through consistent presence and genuine care.
- Share meals, attend events and be part of their lives beyond formal ministry.
- Encourage mutuality—accompaniment is not one-sided.

### 5. Lead Toward Christ

"Spiritual accompaniment must lead others ever closer to God." – *Evangelii Gaudium*, 170[1]

- Accompaniment is not just emotional support—it's a pilgrimage with Christ.
- Help others discern God's voice in their lives.
- Use Scripture, prayer and sacramental life as anchors.

### 6. Be Courageous and Creative

- Don't shy away from difficult conversations or complex situations.
- Be willing to enter the "night" of someone's experience, as Pope Francis says, and help them find light[3].
- Use art, storytelling and cultural expressions to connect meaningfully.

*"Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur."*

– *Evangelii Gaudium*, 171[2]

## 7. Build an Accompanying Parish Culture

From The Art of Accompaniment guide by Bill Huebsch[4]:

- Train pastoral teams in accompaniment skills.
- Make accompaniment part of liturgy, catechesis and outreach.
- Ensure ministries reflect mercy, welcome and relational depth.

### References

[1] [catholicexchange.com](http://catholicexchange.com)

[2] [burningheartsdisciples.org](http://burningheartsdisciples.org)

[3] [www.ncronline.org](http://www.ncronline.org)

[4] [ww2.twentythirdpublications.com](http://ww2.twentythirdpublications.com)

# PART FOUR

## Practical tools for accompaniment

### COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Pastoral leaders play a vital role in guiding their communities through the All Things New pastoral planning process.

To support you in this mission, the following themes provide a framework for communication and accompaniment.

- Consistency ensures that parishioners hear one unified message across all parishes in an ACC.
- Transparency builds credibility. Leaders are encouraged to share what is known, acknowledge what is still being discerned and invite people into the process.
- Pastoral sensitivity reminds leaders that communication is not just about information but about care. Every message should be framed in terms of accompaniment, mission and hope, recognizing the grief and uncertainty people may feel.
- Dialogue is essential. Leaders are called to balance announcements with opportunities for listening, creating spaces where parishioners can share their questions, concerns and hopes, and responding with patience and respect.
- Celebration keeps morale strong. Leaders should mark milestones, highlight stories of collaboration and remind people that God is at work in their midst, making all things new.

These principles reflect the way Christ communicates – with truth, compassion and joy. As pastoral leaders accompany their people, these principles can guide your words and actions.

While every ACC is going to be working on different schedules, this is a general framework for communication. It can and should be tailored to your specific timelines.

### STEP 1 - ANNOUNCEMENT AND GROUNDING

- Weekend Masses: Pastors deliver a unified announcement homily/statement.
- Pastoral Letter: Publish in bulletins, parish websites and social media. (This was emailed by the Planning Office).
- Handouts: Consider a one-page summary of the plan (vision, goals, timeline).
- Listening Presence: If comfortable, consider having priests and ACC leaders available after Masses for informal conversation.

## **STEP 2 - LISTENING**

- ACC-Wide briefing: Begin with prayer and Scripture, followed by presentation and Q&A.
- Digital Launch: ACC webpage with FAQs, video message from pastors and optional feedback form.
- Bulletin Inserts: Weekly “Did You Know?” column explaining one aspect of the plan.

## **STEP 3 - PASTORAL CARE AND ACCOMPANIMENT**

- Grief Support: Prayer services or evenings of reflection on transition and loss.
- Resource Sharing: Provide grief resource lists and companioning tools.
- Personal Testimonies: Share parishioner stories of hope and resilience.
- Clergy/Staff Check-Ins: Internal meetings to support those most affected by change.

## **STEP 4 - HOSPITALITY AND COMMUNITY BUILDING**

- Joint fellowship event: ACC potluck or picnic to celebrate unity.
- Hospitality training: Equip ushers, greeters and volunteers to welcome warmly.
- Highlight collaboration: Share stories of ministries working together.
- Milestone recognition: Celebrate progress (new ministries, shared liturgies, youth events).

## **STEP 5 - TRANSPARENCY AND UPDATES**

- Monthly Bulletin Column: “Where we are now” – practical updates with pastoral framing.
- Financial/Structural Clarity: Share changes openly, explaining how they serve the mission.
- Video updates: Short clips from pastors or ACC leaders posted online.
- Feedback loop: Continue gathering parishioner input and address common concerns.

## **STEP 6 - CELEBRATION AND RENEWAL**

- ACC-Wide Mass of Thanksgiving: Special liturgy with intercessions for unity and renewal. \*Stay tuned for more on this as the bishop is considering a date for a diocesan-wide Mass of Unity.
- Community meal: Fellowship after Mass to strengthen bonds.
- Bishop’s message: Share a letter or video affirming the ACC’s journey. \*Stay tuned for this message to develop.
- Reflection prompts: Encourage parishioners to pray and reflect on “moving forward with hope.”



