

Bulletin January 19, 2025

All Things New: Strategic Planning in the Diocese of Saint Cloud “I believe that this process will surely give birth to an even more dynamic diocese, reenergized and more focused on knowing Christ on the deepest level. Together, with God’s promise, we will make all things new by honoring the past and inspiring the future.” – Bishop Patrick Neary, C.S.C.

Much like our own individual lives, every living organization undergoes change in its lifecycle. Some is inherent, natural growth and decline because of its physical being. Some is adaptation to changes in its environment, culture, and the unexpected events of history. While it can be unsettling, change is in fact a sign of life and vibrancy.

25 years ago, the Diocese of Saint Cloud did a survey on its projected future called “Facing the Future Together.” Looking at its findings today reveals that the changes we are experiencing in our parishes and communities is consistent with expectations. Among the findings (with some commentary) from 1999:

“ ... the number of priests available for active parish ministry is likely to decline from 115 in 1999 ... CARA projects that 51 priests will be available for active ministry in 2025.” [we are just a few priests above that projection, thanks to men who have delayed retirement]

“ ...many [priests] express a desire to cluster rather than close parishes, but fewer express a desire to serve in clustered parishes. [in fact there are only three onepastor-one-parish settings left, and they are very large communities; but in every situation, all parishes are engaged with others in an Area Catholic Community]

- nearly 90% feel that increasing parish staffing for ministries in areas of youth, faith formation, and music would be helpful [the generous and indispensable gifts of laypersons in providing ministry is a great story of lived faith and vitality]

- The largest challenges identified by participants still sound familiar in 2025: The use of lay ministry and preservation of smaller parishes that are vibrant Involving people in the plans – they need to plan their own future. Realistic expectations of priests. Overcome divisions in clergy. To utilize the priest as efficiently as possible. To provide pastoral services to all parishes including small parishes. The biggest challenge will be convincing parishioners to cooperate with the larger vision of the Church ... seeing the larger vision of the Church. The top concerns for ministry focus were identified as: the needs of youth and young adults; protecting human life at all stages of its development; helping parishioners build strong family relationships; strengthening couples’ commitment to maintaining a Christian marriage; strengthening parents’ ability to raise their children as Catholics; helping newcomers feel welcome; homilies that help people apply faith to life; caring for the terminally ill and dying [all these remain our tasks]

After careful preparation, times of listening to leaders in all 29 ACCs, and consultation, the Diocese is about to engage in the next step of strategic planning for all the parishes and Area Catholic Communities across our 16 counties. This process will unfold over the next year. For regular information and resources, please visit the tab, “All Things New,” on the website of the diocese or go directly to <https://stcdio.org/all-things-new/>. You can also subscribe there to email updates sent directly to your inbox.

Currently, each pastor is selecting persons from the parishes he serves for an ACC Planning Council. There will be representation from the existing ACC Pastoral Councils, parish-level councils or advisory bodies, staff members, trustees, and members of the parish at large. To make the Planning Council a workable size, this group will be 8-12 members in each ACC. But part of their charge will be to create ways to hear from the parishioners in each place.

The Council will be supported by teams from diocesan leadership and staff, and guided by a “Playbook” of sorts so there is a common understanding across the diocese for this process.

What will the outcome be? Bishop Neary’s quote above gives us the goal. How we get there will be the subject of much listening to the Holy Spirit and one another in each of our 29 ACC’s. We don’t have the picture yet. But it is coming into gradual focus. We will honor the past – the deposit of faith that unites us with the Church across all places and times, as well as our own local histories in each parish – while inspiring a future that our children and grandchildren will inherit.

Please do pray for discernment according to God’s wisdom for our common life. The Church is the Body of Christ; we are its stewards. Pilgrims of Hope, we can look to a future filled with the same gifts of grace and charity that our ancestors in faith experienced, since the same Jesus is still in our midst, our Redeemer, Teacher, and Life.