

INTRODUCTORY GUIDEBOOK

for *All Things New* Pastoral Planning Process

2025



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

Planning Committees and Facilitators



*“Behold, I make
all things new.
Write these words down,
for they are trustworthy
and true.”*

– Revelations 21:5

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

As I marked my second anniversary as the bishop of the Diocese of St. Cloud in February, I can honestly say how blessed I feel to serve in this role as your spiritual shepherd. I never dreamt that the Lord would ever call me to be a bishop, but my desire is to do whatever he asks me to do, knowing that he alone can provide the grace and strength to fulfill his will.

One of the first things I was invited to do by the diocesan staff when I first began serving as bishop was to take a CliftonStrengths inventory. The diocesan staff has been using this tool to foster teamwork for years and they wanted to see where my strengths lie. If you're not familiar with this program, there are 34 strengths and, after completing an intense questionnaire, it lists them in order. It turns out that my number one strength is positivity!

The description Clifton gives is that people with this strength have contagious enthusiasm, and that they are upbeat and can get others excited about what they are going to do.

I feel deep down, however, that positivity, while a Clifton strength, must be rooted in the theological virtue of hope, or it remains a shallow strength. It means placing our sole hope in Christ no matter what challenges or crosses present themselves to us as the body of Christ. The theme for this Jubilee Year proclaimed by Pope Francis is "Pilgrims of Hope," which emphasizes the role of hope in navigating life's challenges. As part of this theme, Catholics are encouraged to trust in God's providence and extend that hope to others.

Well, here is where the rubber meets the road. It became clear to me early on in my tenure as bishop that our beloved diocese, like many other dioceses in the United States, would need to initiate a pastoral planning process. Over the past year, data was collected and developed into a current reality report identifying the significant challenges our diocese is facing. To name a few, since 2010, Mass attendance has declined by 33%, weddings have declined by 45%, baptisms by 45% and confirmations by 35%.

The average occupancy of our churches for Sunday Mass is at 39%.

Four out of five parishes in our diocese are unable to meet ministry and operations budgets through Sunday offerings alone. Our priests are shepherding, on average, 2.4 parishes, which is more than double the national average per priest in the United States. I worry greatly about the growing fatigue being experienced by our priests.

As you've heard, the theme for our pastoral planning process, "All Things New: Honoring the Past, Inspiring the Future," is centered on the virtue of hope as we begin a process that will undoubtedly not be an easy one. As a diocese, we will pass through moments of grieving together, and grief often involves intense sadness, feelings of shock and numbness, as well as feelings of denial and anger.

What I would like to place before us is a broader sense of what it means to be the Church. When St. Teresa of Calcutta was asked how she would define the Church, she said, "But who is the Church? You and I... The Church are those who follow him." The Church is not primarily a church building but people who are disciples of Jesus Christ.

I'm reminded of a time when Cardinal Francis George talked about the early Christians and how they had neither church buildings, school buildings nor hospital buildings, yet they managed to convert half of the Roman Empire to the Christian faith before Christianity was at last made legal in 313 AD.

What I hope for is a vision that enables us to feel that no matter how many church buildings we have, we are welcome in all of them. I want us to see that we are blessed with just over 100,000 Catholics in our diocese and that we are all one family in faith. We all know that in our families, there are times when we disagree, times we hurt each other's feelings and times where we have to lay down our own wants for the good of those we love. Our church family is no different.

As a family of faith, we will all have to make some changes, some sacrifices, to build healthy communities, healthy priests and pastoral teams, healthy budgets and healthy liturgies.

We may have to drive a little farther or get up a little earlier to encounter Jesus in the Eucharist and in our neighbors gathered there. We may have to say goodbye to a building or place we have grown to love. But we will do this together. We will do this in love. We will do this with each other's support, and we will do this because we are asked by God to build his Church wherever we are gathered.

In this Jubilee Year 2025, we are invited to be pilgrims of hope, no matter the challenges that may lie before us. Some may say it is my gift of positivity that makes me always on the lookout for ways to make sure our glass is half full, but I'd say it is my hope in the Lord to make sure that our cup more than runneth over.

Yours in Christ,

+ Patrick M. Neary, C.S.C.

Bishop Patrick M. Neary, C.S.C.

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.

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1 SECTION 1: Introduction

Pastoral planning is a vital process for shaping the future of vibrant, mission-driven faith communities. It is a journey of discernment, collaboration and action, rooted in the Gospel and guided by the Holy Spirit. This guidebook is designed to support pastoral leaders, teams and communities to envision and implement strategies that foster spiritual growth, strengthen ministries and respond to the unique needs of their people. Together, we can build communities that reflect God's love and respond to the call to missionary discipleship in a changing world.

History of Area Catholic Communities

For more than three decades, our diocese has entrusted multiple parishes to pastors with the expectation to maintain the workload that had previously been shared between many priests. For the sake of effective ministry, and with increasing ministerial burnout in the last ten years, change is necessary.

In the Fall of 2015, a task force was created to look at ways to serve parishes with the diminishing number of priests in the Diocese of Saint Cloud. In the Spring of 2016, the task force recommended to the bishop the need for "consulting broadly... providing you and your fellow presbyters with accurate information and building the rapport necessary for clerical and lay parish leadership to buy into the process and its outcomes." The planning council then began the task of creating a process for broad consultation. In the Summer of 2017 - Spring 2018 the following questions were presented to presbyters, leaders in the parish, and parishioners: What does it mean to have a quality parish life? What resources does a parish need to have that quality of life? How can we sustain 131 parishes with a projected 57 priests under the age of 70 as we look to the future? How do we maintain a Catholic presence in the 16 counties, 12,500 square miles of the Diocese of Saint Cloud? What substantial recommendations do you have for the diocese? The responses to these questions can be found on the diocesan planning website, visit www.stcdio.org/planning.

Area Catholic Communities (ACCs) were created in 2019 to address the demographic changes and a decline in Catholic population and priests across the diocese. Every parish in the Diocese of Saint Cloud became part of an Area Catholic Community that was invited to collaborate to provide for the pastoral and spiritual needs of all. Area Catholic Communities were expected to share resources, talents, and efforts with an intent to reenergize Catholics, so all parishes thrive in the Diocese of Saint Cloud.

FEBRUARY 2023

BISHOP PATRICK NEARY ORDAINED

NOVEMBER 2023-JULY 2024

ACC PASTORAL VISITS WITH BISHOP NEARY

SPRING 2024

DATA COLLECTION AND EVALUATION FROM EMMAUS PARTNERS
(outside consulting firm)

AUGUST - DECEMBER 2024

CURRENT REALITY AND PLAN DEVELOPMENT SHARED WITH CLERGY
AND VARIOUS GROUPS

OCTOBER 2024 - JULY 2025

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

SPRING 2025

LOCAL ALL THINGS NEW PLANNING BEGINS

DECEMBER 31, 2025

ACC PLANS SUBMITTED TO PLANNING OFFICE

2026

IMPLEMENTATION BEGINS

2

SECTION 2: Rights and Responsibilities of the Baptized

Co-Responsibility

Pope Benedict XVI introduced the concept of “co-responsibility” in the Church, emphasizing the active role of the laity in the life of the Church, particularly in their involvement in parish life. This concept is intricately linked to the rights and responsibilities of the baptized, as it highlights the shared mission of all members of the Church, clergy and laity alike. He highlighted this idea in a 2009 address to the Diocese of Rome and further elaborated on it in a 2012 message to the International Forum of Catholic Action[1][2].

According to Pope Benedict, co-responsibility goes beyond mere collaboration. It involves recognizing the unique roles and contributions of both clergy and laypeople while working together in unity. He stressed that the laity should actively participate in the Church’s mission, respecting the different ministries and tasks within the Church, and maintaining a harmonious relationship with the bishops[2].

This concept encourages a more inclusive and participatory approach to Church life, where everyone, regardless of their specific role, contributes to the Church’s mission in a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation[1][2].

References

[1] *Opening of the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome on the Theme: “Church Membership and Pastoral Co-Responsibility,”* (May 26, 2009). Address of Pope Benedict XVI.

[2] Schlumpf, Heidi (2020, 13 March). *What is Co-Responsibility and does the Church Need It?* National Catholic Reporter.

3

SECTION 3: Roles of Key Leaders

Planning Facilitator Teams *All Things New* ACC Planning Committee Pastors

Planning Facilitator Teams

Purpose: Planning Facilitator Teams will accompany the ACC All Things New Planning Committee to develop a comprehensive plan to present to the diocese and the bishop, ensuring a successful and strategic future for the ACC. This role is crucial in fostering relationships, understanding and implementing diocesan guiding principles and parameters, and guiding the committee through the planning process.

Key Responsibilities:

- **Accompanying the ACC Planning Committee:** Provide ongoing support and guidance to the ACC Planning Committee throughout the planning process.
- **Building Relationships Rooted in Trust:** Establish and maintain strong, trust-based relationships with committee members and stakeholders.
- **Attending Training:** Participate in training sessions for the role and for the ACC Planning Council to stay informed and equipped for the task.
- **Understanding and Explaining Parameters:** Gain a thorough understanding of the diocesan parameters and be able to explain and answer questions about their implementation.
- **Guiding Through Conflict:** Facilitate difficult discussions with sensitivity and tact to ensure constructive outcomes. Navigate and resolve conflicts within the committee, promoting a collaborative and positive environment.
- **Reviewing Drafts of Plans:** Assist in the review and refinement of draft plans to ensure they meet the strategic objectives and parameters set by the diocese.

All Things New ACC Planning Committee

The ACC Planning Committee is comprised of members of the Area Catholic Community.

Purpose: The *All Things New* ACC Planning Committee is committed to developing a comprehensive plan for the ACC that fosters a vibrant faith community rooted in the love and mission of Jesus and in line with the diocesan parameters provided. The committee will work in collaboration with the Planning Facilitator Team, diocesan staff, and ACC community members, guided by the Holy Spirit, to create a strategic, future-oriented plan.

Key Responsibilities:

- **Developing plan for the ACC:** Create a robust plan for the ACC that aligns with the diocesan parameters and guiding principles.
- **Collaboration and Support:** Work closely with the assigned Planning Facilitator Team, ACC pastoral council, and diocesan staff to ensure cohesive and well-supported planning efforts.
- **Community Engagement:** Engage with the community to listen to their needs and perspectives, incorporating their input into the planning process. Ensure that the process and the plan are effectively communicated along the way.
- **Guiding Principles:** Ensure the plan embodies the guiding principles of missionary discipleship, sacramental life, engaging the laity, listening as a way of being Church and prudent stewardship.
- **Connecting with current plan:** If the ACC has a current strategic plan, connecting the two plans will be necessary. Ensure that the current and proposed plans are complementary.

Pastor

Purpose: Pastors play a critical role in the *All Things New* planning process, as they serve as both a spiritual leader, facilitator of collaboration and a practical guide for the parish or community.

Key Responsibilities:

- **Be a facilitator of co-responsibility:** Empower lay leaders to actively participate in creating a robust plan for the ACC that aligns with the diocesan parameters and guiding principles.
- **Collaborate** with other deanery pastors when needed.
- **Embody the values of the Gospel** by inspiring trust and commitment.
- **Continue the groundwork** that already exists.
- **Be a bridge builder** among parish staff, councils, committees.
- **Respect differences and encourage respectful dialogue.**
- **Listen attentively** to concerns, hopes and ideas of parishioners.
- **Shepherd the community** through planning, change and transition.
- **Help all involved walk through conflict** in a healthy way.
- **Advocate for unity** by communicating the shared mission and mitigating divisions during the process.
- **Inform the community** of the progress of the plan ensuring transparency and accountability.
- **Recognize where healing is needed.**

Confidentiality in Pastoral Planning

Confidentiality is a cornerstone of effective pastoral planning, ensuring trust, integrity and openness throughout the process. As sensitive topics arise, maintaining confidentiality protects the dignity of all individuals involved. It fosters a safe environment where stakeholders can share concerns, ideas and feedback freely, without fear of judgment or misuse of information.

Respecting confidentiality also upholds the credibility of pastoral leaders, demonstrating a commitment to ethical decision-making and transparency while ensuring sensitive information is shared responsibly and at the appropriate time. This trust-building approach is essential for uniting communities, avoiding misunderstandings, and fostering collaboration as the Church discerns and responds to its mission. When confidentiality is honored, a transformative process that strengthens both relationships and faith communities is achieved.

Broad Vision Thinking in Pastoral Planning

Broad vision thinking ensures that pastoral planning remains focused on advancing the Church's mission while staying responsive to the changing dynamics of the world and its people. It is essential in pastoral planning because it allows leaders to look beyond immediate concerns and focus on the long-term mission and growth of the Church. By embracing a wider perspective and considering the evolving challenges and opportunities facing the Church, pastoral leaders can assess the spiritual, cultural, and social needs of the community. This kind of thinking fosters innovation, creativity, and a deeper alignment with the Gospel message, ensuring that decisions are not just reactive but proactive and mission driven. A broad vision helps leaders identify trends, anticipate future needs, and develop strategies that build sustainable, vibrant communities of faith. It also encourages inclusivity by inviting diverse voices into the planning process, promoting a collaborative spirit that strengthens the unity of the Church.

Authority and Decision Making

Each plan created for the ACC will be submitted to the Planning Office. These plans are proposals to the bishop. Final decisions on plans will be made by the bishop.

Connection to Existing Pastoral Plan

Area Catholic Communities were created to increase collaboration and share resources between parishes. This does not stop as we plan for the next step in our Area Catholic Communities.

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SECTION 4: Guiding Principles

Missionary Discipleship
Sacramental Life
Engaging the Laity
Listening as a Way of Being Church
Prudent Stewardship

Guiding principles are essential in the pastoral planning process because they serve as foundational values that anchor decision-making, promote unity and keep the community focused on its mission.

Guiding principles provide clarity and direction amid complex and often emotional decisions, helping leaders and participants prioritize what matters most. They foster transparency, accountability, and consistency, ensuring that actions taken during the planning process reflect shared values rather than personal preferences or short-term goals. By acting as a moral and spiritual compass, guiding principles encourage collaboration, inspire trust and help faith communities navigate challenges with a sense of purpose and integrity.

There are five guiding principles for the *All Things New* planning process: Missionary Discipleship, Sacramental Life, Engaging the Laity, Listening as a Way of Being Church, and Prudent Stewardship. All of these principles come directly from the current reality report and the pastoral visits with Bishop Neary.

For further information, additional resources and descriptions of the guiding principles, visit www.stcdio.org/all-things-new/.

Missionary Discipleship

As baptized Catholics, we are all called to the evangelizing mission of the Church. Rooted in this mission, together we are guided by a desire to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in the world by living and sharing a life of faith.

Sacramental Life

The sacraments are outward signs of grace that God gives to people to help them live a life close to Jesus. We are guided by an invitation to encourage the full, conscious and active participation of the faithful in sacramental life and prayer of the Church.

Engaging the Laity

God has given each person a unique set of gifts and charisms to live out their individual vocation. Through revitalized prayer and formation opportunities, encounters with family, friends, co-workers and neighbors, we can welcome new faces into the fold. We are guided by our strengths to stimulate renewal in the Church.

Listening as a Way of Being Church

The Holy Spirit calls us to pray, listen and discern together what God is asking of us today. By listening to each other, we are guided by learning to best respond to the spiritual needs of all people in our diocese.

Prudent Stewardship

All our resources – human, structural, financial – are gifts from God. With a deep sense of gratitude, we are guided by the use of resources to achieve our shared mission in a healthy and responsible way.

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SECTION 5: Design Parameters for the Pastoral Plan

Design parameters are crucial in creating a strategic plan because they provide a clear framework for decision-making, ensuring that the Church's mission is carried out effectively and sustainably. Each parameter was developed from listening to various groups throughout the Diocese of Saint Cloud. A strategic plan built on these parameters will help the Church flourish, grow, and effectively serve its people for generations to come. Additional details for each parameter follow this page.

Accessibility to Sunday Mass (*includes Saturday evening vigil*) (P. 10)

- 80 % of the faithful must have access to a Sunday Mass within a 20-minute drive.
- No rotation of Mass schedules between churches.

Budgeted Ministries (P. 10/11)

- One administrative office per ACC if under 3000 households.
 - ACC Business Administrator (*Paid*).
- Liturgical Ministries.
- Formation Ministries: Children - Youth - Adult.
 - Catholic schools included.
- Hispanic ministries with 10% of the total census population.
- Pastoral Care.
- Social Outreach.

Pastors/Priests (P. 12)

- Limit of three Sunday Masses per weekend/priest not including weddings/funerals.
 - Mass schedule must be able to be accommodated by assigned priests to ACC.
- Pastors will spend at least 50% of their time in pastoral ministry.
- Desire to live in community within ACC will be considered.

Buildings (P. 12/13)

- Overall facility usage must average 50% occupancy or higher for all weekend liturgies in the ACC.
- Buildings must be physically accessible, hospitable and safe.
 - Restrooms in church building.
 - Church building is either one level or has access to an existing elevator.
- ACC plan must specify how empty buildings will be repurposed or relegated for secular but not unbecoming use ideally within five years.

Governance (P. 13)

- Reduce the number of parish corporations.
- Potential Worship Sites - Primary Church, Partner Church.

Finances (P. 14)

- Each finance council will approve an attainable and reasonable annual balanced budget.
- Parish investment in Catholic school may not exceed 40% of plate/envelope within five years.
- Routine building operations may not exceed 25% of plate/envelope.

Accessibility to Sunday Mass

Ensuring accessibility to Sunday Mass is a priority because the Eucharist is the heart of Catholic life. Parishioners should have the opportunity to participate in worship without unnecessary obstacles. Accessible locations foster a stronger faith community, support spiritual growth and allow all—especially the elderly, families and those with disabilities—to fully engage in the life of the Church.

80% of the faithful must have access to Sunday Mass within a 20-minute drive

Celebration of the Eucharist is central to Catholic worship. Mass is a communal act of worship where Catholics come together as the Body of Christ. The Church teaches that faith is not just individual but lived out in community. Attending in person fosters this sense of unity and shared belief. Having access to this communal worship is a priority.

No rotation of Mass schedules between churches (*Seasonal or otherwise*)

Maintaining a fixed Sunday Mass location provides significant pastoral and practical benefits. There can be confusion among churchgoers and presiders as to where the Mass takes place. A fixed location for Sunday Mass provides a stable routine for parishioners, making it easier for them to attend regularly and engage in parish life. Keeping Sunday Mass in one place fosters a stronger sense of belonging, they form deeper relationships and a stronger parish identity. Maintaining multiple churches for rotating Masses can increase costs for utilities, maintenance, and supplies. A single, designated location streamlines resources.

Budgeted Ministries

The Catholic Church exists because it believes it was founded by Jesus Christ to continue His mission on earth: to bring people into communion with God, proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, and guide humanity toward salvation. A budget reflects how we steward our resources for the sake of the mission. Allocating resources wisely and ethically shows gratitude to God and acknowledges that we are caretakers, not owners, of what we have (Psalm 24:1). This includes ensuring just compensation for clergy, staff and those who serve the Church, recognizing their dedication and commitment to ministry. The following are areas that are part of administration/mission and expected to be in the budget.

One central administrative office per ACC if under 3000 households

One administrative office for the ACC serves both practical and strategic purposes. It allows for the pooling of resources—such as finances, staff, technology, and formation programs—which can then be efficiently distributed across various locations. This leads to greater efficiency and cost savings.

ACC Business Administrator (*paid*)

Additionally, having a paid business administrator with expertise in human resources, financial management and building maintenance can alleviate some of the administrative burden on the pastor, allowing him to focus more on pastoral and spiritual leadership.

Liturgical Ministries

Including liturgical ministries in the budget ensures vibrant, sacred and engaging worship, strengthening the community's spiritual life. The Church's mission is to lead the faithful in worship and provide sacraments. Liturgical ministries uphold the reverence and beauty of Masses and sacramental celebrations. Budgeting for these ministries supports training for lectors, altar servers, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion and musicians. It also covers essential liturgical items like altar wine, hosts, candles, vestments and sacred vessels. Quality music enhances worship, requiring funds for hymnals, licensing, instruments and choir needs. Additionally, seasonal decorations such as flowers and banners enrich the sacred atmosphere.

Formation Ministries

Formation ministries are crucial because they directly contribute to the Church's mission of evangelization, discipleship and community building. They ensure that Catholics of all ages grow in their understanding of the faith, and that faith is nurtured across all generations which create a vibrant, engaged and spiritually-enriched community.

Hispanic Ministries with 10% of the total census population

Hispanic ministry is an essential budgeted item in the Catholic Church because it ensures that the growing Hispanic/Latino Catholic population is effectively served, engaged, and empowered in the faith. By ensuring Hispanic ministry is included in the budget, the Church acknowledges and supports the needs of a vital and growing part of the Catholic community, strengthening both faith and unity in the Church.

Pastoral Care

Pastoral care is an essential part of the Catholic Church's mission. Pastoral care provides sacramental, spiritual, emotional, hospital, hospice, prison and bereavement support. Investing in pastoral care ensures that the Church lives out Christ's call to serve, heal and accompany people in all stages of life, strengthening the faith community and always making God's love more visible to all people.

Social Outreach

Social ministry is the expression of the Church's mission to live out the Gospel in the world. It is a call given to all the baptized to use their gifts and talents to serve others and promote the common good, creating a more just and loving world. It is not merely an optional add-on to parish life, but rather an essential part of what it means to be followers of Jesus Christ and a community of faith. Every act of service, no matter how small, contributes to the transformative work of building God's kingdom on earth.

Priests/Pastors

The health of a priest is vital to his ability to serve the Church and its community. A priest's physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being directly impacts his effectiveness in ministry, as he is called to lead, preach, and care for the flock. Ensuring that priests have the support, rest and resources they need allows them to continue their ministry with strength, clarity and compassion.

Limit of three Sunday Masses per weekend/priest not including weddings/funerals

- **Mass schedule must be able to be accommodated by assigned priests to ACC**

It is essential to prevent priest burnout by ensuring a manageable Mass schedule. Limiting Masses allows priests to provide quality ministry, maintain personal well-being and attend to other responsibilities like sacramental preparation and pastoral care. Balancing Mass duties with rest preserves clergy health and effectiveness. Relying on retired priests for scheduling is not a sustainable solution.

Pastors will spend at least 50% of their time in pastoral ministry

Pastors should not spend an unbalanced amount of time on administrative tasks at the expense of their ministerial and sacramental duties—the very purpose of their ordination. While the pastor leads the parish and oversees its overall well-being, others can assist with administration and various ministries, allowing him to focus more on spiritual leadership.

Desire to live in community within the ACC will be considered

There is an increasing desire from our priests to want to live in community. This desire comes from wanting to support one another in prayer and ministry daily. If the priests assigned to a particular ACC want to live together, that request will be considered by the bishop.

Buildings

Church buildings are sacred spaces where the faithful gather to worship, encounter God and grow in community. A well-utilized church fosters vibrant liturgies, drawing people into deeper participation in the sacraments and spiritual life. Ensuring the space is hospitable, accessible and safe enhances the worship experience and strengthens the parish's mission. When a church is full and alive with prayer, song and sacramental celebrations, it reflects the vitality of the faith community and its commitment to honoring the sacred space entrusted to it.

Overall facility usage must average 50% occupancy or higher for all weekend liturgies for the ACC

The Vibrant ACC

| | SEATING CAPACITY | AVERAGE MASS ATTENDANCE | PERCENT | NUMBER OF MASSES |
|--------------|---------------------|----------------------------|------------|---------------------|
| Church A | 255 | 132 | 52% | 1 |
| Church B | 900 | 392 | 44% | 2 |
| Church C | 824 | 267 | 32% | 2 |
| Church D | 340 | 123 | 36% | 2 |
| Total | 2319 | 914 | 41% | 7 |

Church buildings must be physically accessible, hospitable and safe

- Restrooms in the church building.
- Church building is either one level or has access to an existing elevator.

ACC plan must specify how empty buildings will be repurposed or relegated for secular but not unbecoming use, ideally within five years.

Governance

Effective governance is essential for the well-being and growth of any parish or diocese. It ensures that the Church's resources are stewarded wisely, decisions are made in alignment with its mission and the community is served with transparency and accountability. Strong governance structures, involving both clergy and laity, foster collaboration, uphold Church teachings and provide the framework for vibrant, sustainable ministry.

Reduce the number of parish corporations

Fewer corporations means simplified decision-making, reporting, and compliance with Church and civil laws. Reducing corporations reduces the amount of administration for the pastor and leadership, strengthens the experience of parish life and reallocates sustainable resources to support missionary discipleship.

Potential Worship sites - Primary Church, Partner Church

It will be helpful to distinguish how the buildings in the ACC will be used and how often.

- **Primary Church**

This church building is where the high feasts are celebrated, *i.e. Triduum, Holy Days of obligation, etc.*

- **Partner Church**

This church building is used on a regular basis. Sunday Masses are celebrated here each weekend.

Finances

Prudent use of money in the Church involves prioritizing resources in a way that supports its mission and serves the needs of the community. It means making thoughtful decisions about spending, ensuring that every dollar is used effectively for ministry, outreach and spiritual growth. This includes budgeting for essential services, maintaining transparency in financial practices and investing in long-term sustainability while avoiding waste. Wise financial stewardship honors the trust placed in the Church and helps to create a lasting impact on both the parish and the broader community.

Each finance council will approve an attainable and reasonable annual balanced budget

Each budget should allocate funds to ministries that help fulfill the Church's mission. A healthy budget primarily relies on regular contributions, such as plate/envelope donations, to cover operating expenses. Relying on fundraising for the operating budget is not sustainable, as it poses a risk if fundraising events are no longer held. Bequests, on the other hand, should be reserved for special needs or long-term projects, as it is not dependable to rely on them for routine operating costs.

Parish investment in Catholic Schools may not exceed 40% of plate/envelope within five years

Catholic school education is a gift in our diocese and should be supported. It should not come at the cost of other ministries, building maintenance or other expected budgeted items.

Routine building operating expenses may not exceed 25% of plate/envelope

The church building is a sacred space for worship, community support and spiritual growth. It exists to nurture the faith of its members and serve the broader community through charity, justice and advocacy. However, operating expenses like electricity, heating and insurance should not limit the budget available for other vital ministries. By managing these costs efficiently, the Church can continue its mission without compromising its commitment to serving others.

6

SECTION 6: Merging Parishes & Relegating Churches

The Differences Between “Parishes” and “Churches” The Merger of Parish Corporations The Use and Relegation of Church Buildings

The Differences Between “Parishes” and “Churches”

In short: The parish is a group of people. The church is the building where the people meet.

Canon 515 §1: “A parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church [diocese], whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (parochus) as its proper pastor (pastor) under the authority of the diocesan bishop.”

Canon 518: “As a general rule, a parish is to be territorial, that is, it is to embrace all Christ’s faithful of a given territory.”

Canon 1214: “The term church means a sacred building intended for divine worship, to which the faithful have right of access for the exercise, especially the public exercise of divine worship.”

Knowing the difference between a parish and a church helps to answer these questions:

1. How many parish corporations (territories) are needed in our diocese/ACC to best serve where our people live?
2. How many churches do we need in our diocese to serve that same group?
3. Of the remaining church buildings, which will be a primary church (or a partner church, if needed), and what will happen to the church buildings that are no longer needed for the celebration of sacraments?

The definition of relegation: a canonical process that takes a church out of use for divine worship and makes it available for other uses. A church building is relegated to secular but not unbecoming use.

In the sections that follow, there will be examples of the kinds of mergers parish corporations may go through and the kinds of relegations church buildings may go through, while discerning the use each church will have in its ACC.

The Merger of Parish Corporations

The *All Things New* ACC Planning Committee is expected to use the parameters provided above to recommend which parishes (groups of people) will need to be merged to form a new territory, with new boundaries that meet the parameters of reduced parish corporations covering the same amount of territory.

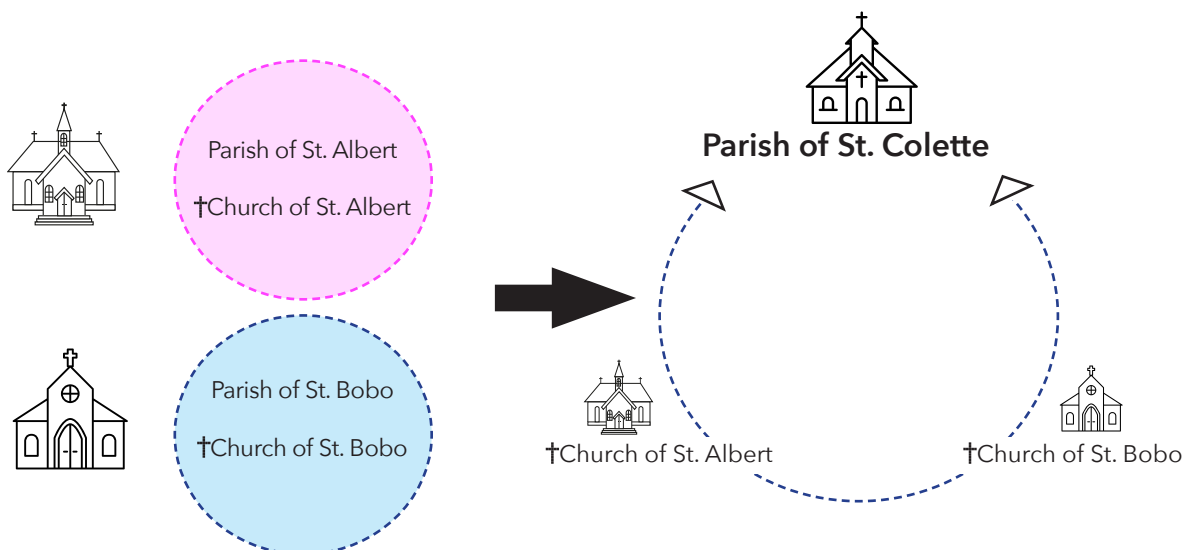
There are two kinds of mergers in canon law that fit our circumstances:

1. *extinctive unions* and
2. *amalgamations*

In extinctive unions, two or more parishes unite to become a new parish with a new name. The old identities are extinct. The separate territories are united. The church buildings keep their names, even though they belong to the new parish corporation. See *Example Parish Merger 1* below.

In amalgamations, one or more parishes are subsumed into an already existing one. The parish corporation being amalgamated loses its identity and takes on the identity of the one which it is entering. The parish corporation taking on the other parishes retains its identity, at its territory now adds on the territory of each parish amalgamating to it. See *Example Parish Merger 2* - P.17.

Example Parish Merger 1: Extinctive Union

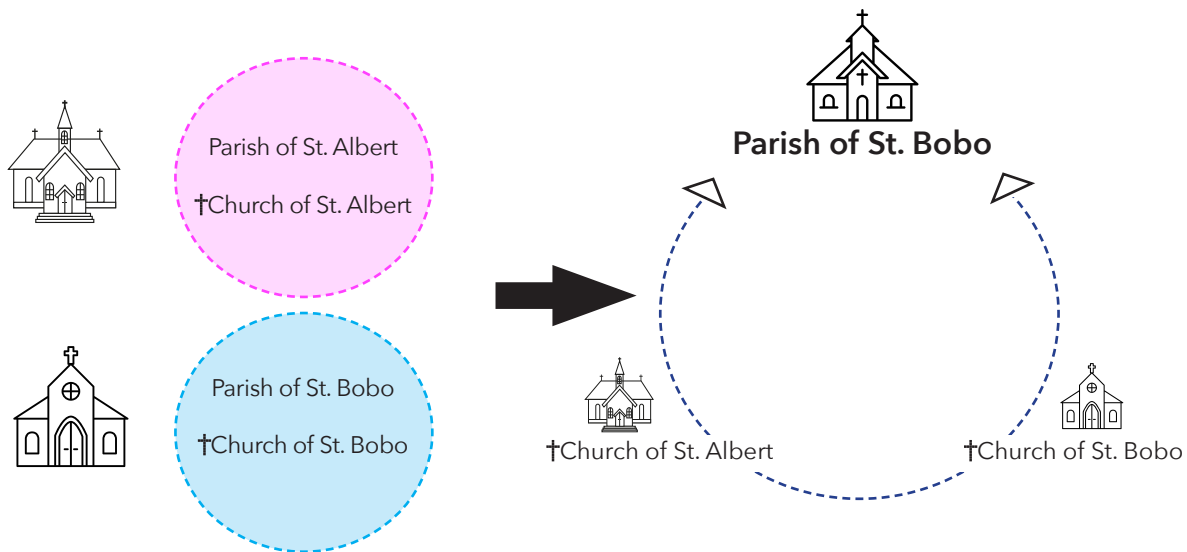


In this extinctive union, the parish corporations of St. Albert and St. Bobo merge to form the new parish corporation of St. Colette.

By decree of the bishop, the parishes of St. Albert and St. Bobo are suppressed (extinguished) at the same moment that the Parish of St. Colette is erected, and from that moment all parishioners who attend the churches of Sts. Albert and Bobo identify themselves as belonging to the Parish of St. Colette.

Both church buildings retain their names.

Example Parish Merger 2: Amalgamation (*absorption*)



In an amalgamation, the parish corporation of St. Albert merges (*amalgamates*) into the parish corporation of St. Bobo.

By decree of the bishop, the Parish of St. Albert is suppressed, and everyone identifies themselves as belonging to the Parish of St. Bobo, whether they go to Mass at either church building, since both church buildings retain their names.

Use and Relegation of Church Buildings

Likewise, and as a separate step from parish mergers, each *All Things New* ACC Planning Committee is to recommend from the current churches that have Sunday Mass in the ACC:

- A. How many of those churches will continue to host Sunday Mass for the newly merged parish(es)?
- B. What will happen to the church buildings that no longer have Sunday Mass?

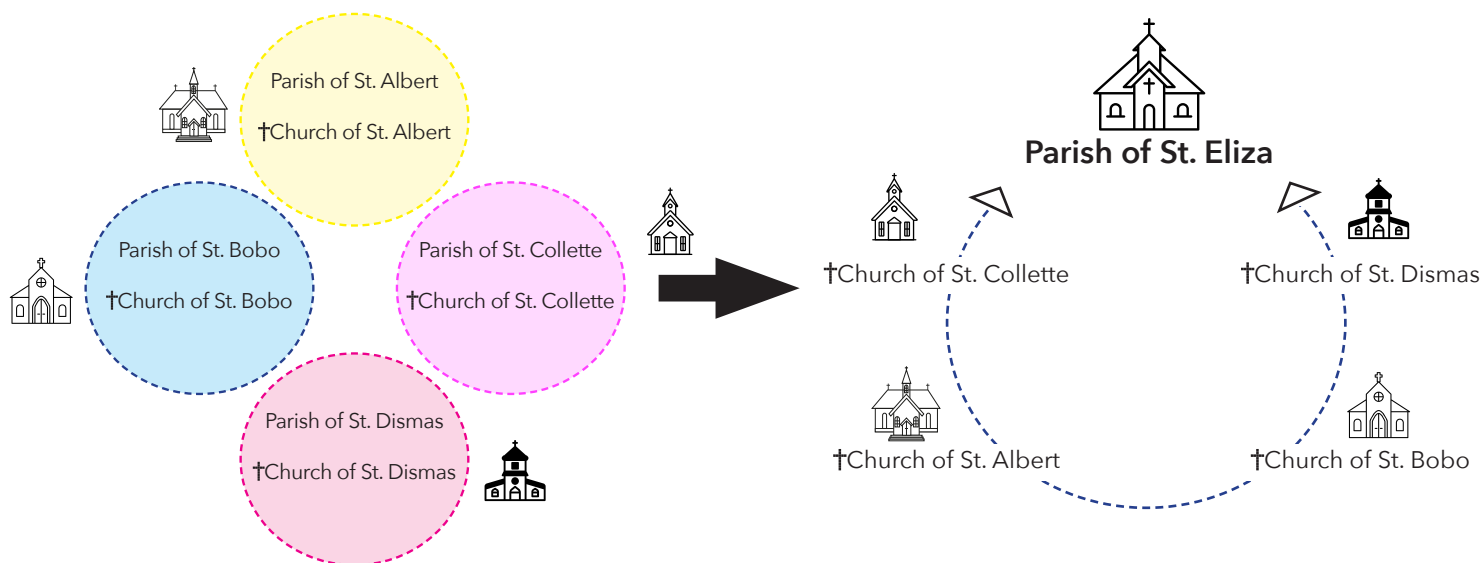
Discerning the use of church buildings within the parish territories is a daunting task. Using the parameters of the diocese, some of the church buildings are better suited to host solemnities, holy days of obligation, and the regular weekend Masses. Some church buildings may also be needed for Sunday Masses, but not for Holy Days. The remaining church buildings, which served their purpose for the time that they were built, should be used for another purpose of the parish or be closed and potentially sold.

1. Primary Church = used for all weekend liturgies and holy days.
2. Partner Church = used for all weekend liturgies but not holy days.
3. Secular-Use Facility (*former church*) = all liturgical furniture (*altars/pulpits/fonts etc*) are removed, the space is deconsecrated with a special ceremony, it is relegated to secular but not unbecoming purpose, and it may now be used for other non-sacred use.
4. Closed facility for no use and prepared for alienation (sale) to interested parties.

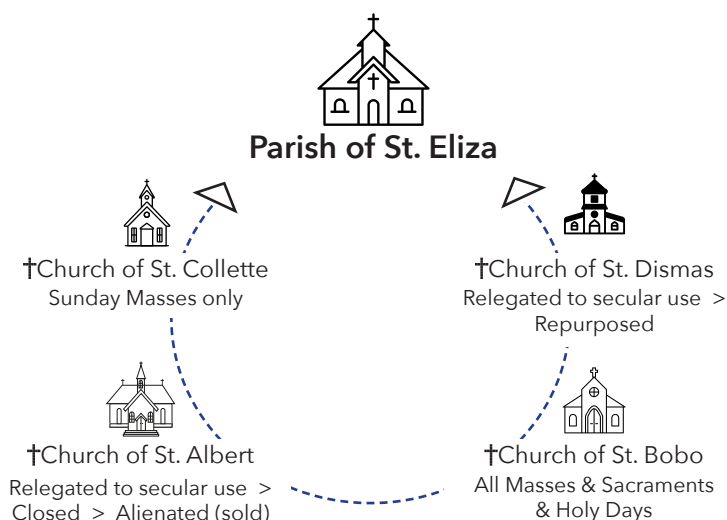
A church building is to be used for worship; thus, it is considered a sacred space for that purpose.

In the last twenty years of pastoral planning, some dioceses throughout the country have opted to relegate churches to secular use and then raise them to the status of an oratory, so that some occasions of Mass and the sacraments might be celebrated by request of former parishioners (e.g., funerals). If an ACC wanted to explore this possible option, it needs to be done in consultation with the planning office.

Example: Relegation of Churches 1: Two churches remain



Like **Parish Merger 1: Extinctive Union** on previous page, the Parishes of St. Albert, St. Bobo, St. Colette, and St. Dismas have merged to form the Parish of St. Eliza. The Parish of St. Eliza still has all the churches from the previous parish corporations. What should be done with each of these church buildings?



The many parishioners of the Parish of St. Eliza would be better suited to use and maintain two churches for Sunday (& *Saturday Vigil*) Masses, one of which is the primary church for holy days of obligation and the other that is a partner church.

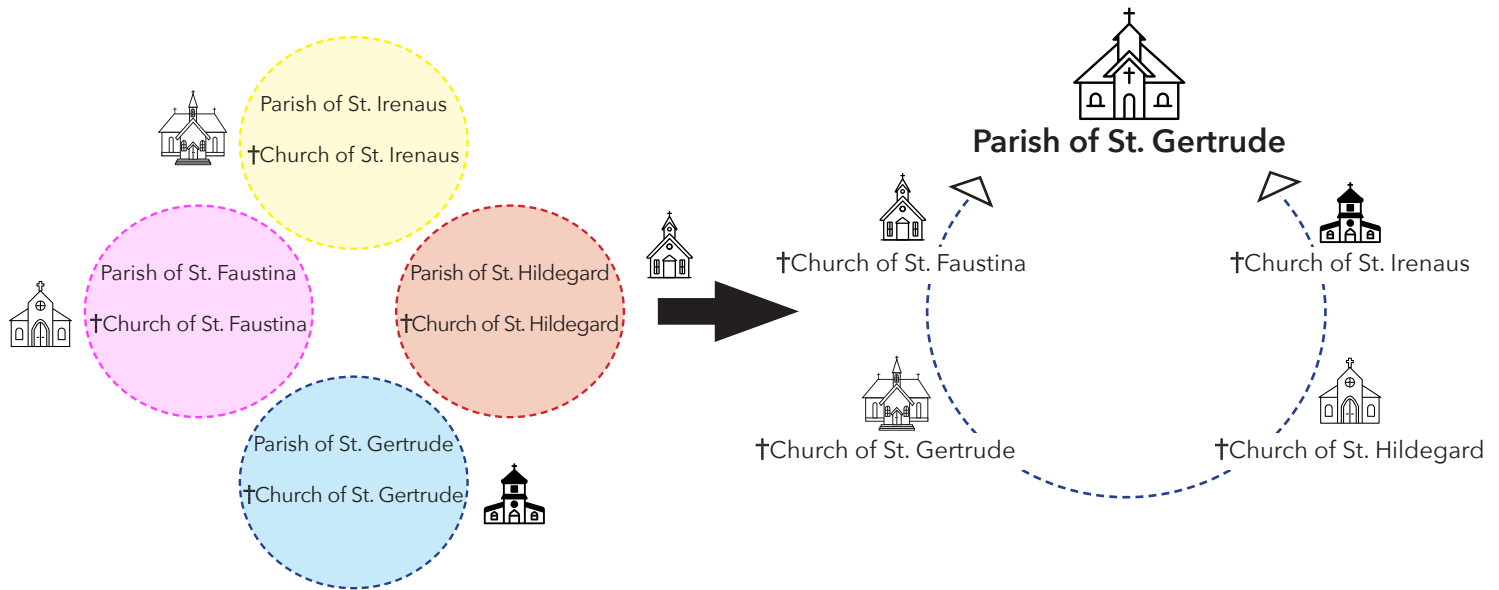
So, The Church of St. Bobo is selected as the primary church. It retains its name. It is the church where special liturgies of Christmas, Holy Week, Easter, and the other holy days of obligation are held.

The Church of St. Colette is selected as a partner church, where Sunday Masses are held, but not holy days of obligation.

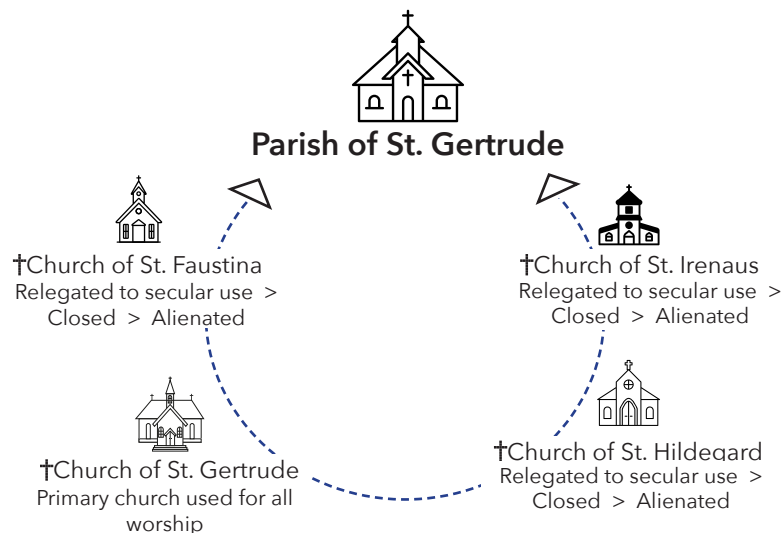
The Churches of St. Albert, and St. Dismas are recommended to the bishop for the canonical process to be relegated to secular (*non-sacred*) use. They are no longer called "churches," since no sacraments will be celebrated there.

Following relegation, the former church building of St. Albert is closed and alienated (*sold*). The former church of St. Dismas is repurposed and given a new name as a multi-purpose Parish of St. Eliza event center, where retreats, youth group, quilting groups, and social events can be held.

Example: Relegation of Churches 2: one church remains



Like *Parish Merger 1: Amalgamation* above, the Parishes of St. Faustina, St. Gertrude, St. Hildegard, and St. Irenaus have amalgamated into the parish of St. Gertrude. What are they to do with four church buildings when they only need one?



The four parishes amalgamated into the Parish of St. Gertrude, because St. Gertrude's Church is centrally located, has the best facilities with the least maintenance, and the most economic resources for future development, like nursing homes, grocery stores, etc. The Church of St. Hildegard is in the same town, just a few blocks from the Church of St. Gertrude, because each church used to service separate language groups in the town when founded, but now those differences no longer are significant enough to warrant keeping two churches open so close to each other. The difficult decision is made to relegate the churches of St. Faustina, St. Hildegard, and St. Irenaus to secular use, with the intent to alienate them when suitable organizations/buyers can purchase them.



SECTION 7: Meeting Resources

Meeting Guidelines
Discernment
Structuring Agendas
Listening Skills
Consensus Making
Conflict Management

Meeting Guidelines

- A. **Respect and Inclusivity:** Everyone's voice is valuable. Listen actively and respect differing opinions.
- B. **Confidentiality:** What is shared in the meeting stays in the meeting unless otherwise agreed upon.
- C. **Mindfulness:** Be present and mindful of your own thoughts and emotions, as well as those of others.
- D. **Openness:** Approach the conversation with an open mind and a willingness to learn and grow.
- E. **Non-judgement:** Avoid making judgements about others' contributions. Focus on understanding and empathy.
- F. **Clear Communication:** Speak clearly and concisely. Avoid interrupting others while they are speaking. Use "I" statements, avoid speaking for others.
- G. **Shared responsibility:** Everyone is responsible for the success of the meeting. Participate actively and support one another.
- H. **Time management:** Stick to the agenda and respect the time allotted for each topic.
- I. **Constructive Feedback:** Provide feedback in a constructive manner, focusing on solutions rather than problems.
- J. **Follow-up:** Ensure that action items and decisions are documented and followed up on promptly.

These ground rules can help create a respectful, inclusive, and productive meeting environment.

Would you like to add or modify any of these? Do all in the group agree with them?

Discernment

Ignatian discernment, rooted in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, offers a structured approach to making thoughtful decisions. Here are some key tips:

1. **Pray for Openness:** Begin by asking for the grace to be open to God's will and free from personal biases[1].
2. **Identify the Decision:** Clearly define the decision you need to make. Ensure it is practical and within your ability to decide[1].
3. **Gather Information:** Collect all relevant information and consider the facts carefully[1].
4. **List Pros and Cons:** Write down the advantages and disadvantages of each option. This helps clarify thoughts and reveal hidden aspects[2].
5. **Imagine the Decision:** Pretend you have already made the decision and live with it for a few days. Notice how you feel emotionally and spiritually[2].
6. **Seek Counsel:** Discuss the decision with a trusted advisor or spiritual director who can offer an objective perspective[1].
7. **Reflect on Long-Term Impact:** Consider how this decision aligns with your goals and values. Imagine looking back on this decision at the end of your life[2].
8. **Pray for Confirmation:** Spend time in prayer, asking for peace and confirmation about the decision[1].

References

- [1] Manney, Jim. *An Ignatian Framework for Making a Decision: 11 Steps for Making a Decision Following the Ignatian Method*.
- [2] Wright, Vinita Hampton. *Four Strategies for Discernment*.

Structuring Agendas

From THRIVE: The Facilitator's Guide to Radically Inclusive Meetings by Dr. Mark Smutny, 2019

1. **Listen** to your team or planning group or to those who will attend the meeting and collect the issues you think should be discussed.
2. **Draft the agenda** after listening well. The best agendas include:
 - a. Welcome
 - i. Facilitator sets the tone and purpose for the gathering
 - b. Introductions
 - i. Even with groups who are familiar with one another, it can go a long way in building relationships
 - ii. Vary questions for introductions based on group familiarity
 - c. Becoming fully present
 - i. Practice silence and deep breathing
 - ii. Prayer
 - iii. Guided meditation
 - d. Ground rules
 - i. Go over at every meeting to reinforce respectful behavior
 - e. Review of the agenda
 - i. Ask for any additions or ways to strengthen it; this builds ownership by participants
 - f. Issues, questions, and process
 - i. At the heart of every meeting is the issues or questions, goals and processes to achieve goals
 - ii. Use open-ended questions as agenda items
 1. Invites creativity, concrete answers, goals, and next steps
 2. List purpose of topic: share information, brainstorm, develop solutions, or reach a decision
 - g. Clarifying outcomes and next steps
 - i. Facilitator or participants can summarize key decisions, outcomes, identify next steps
 - h. Evaluation
 - i. Purpose is to teach both facilitator and participants what went well in the meeting
 - ii. Ask questions that improve the meetings and get constructive feedback

Listening Skills

Active listening is a valuable skill for effective communication. Here are some tips to help you practice active listening:

1. **Pay Full Attention:** Focus completely on the speaker, avoiding distractions like your phone or other tasks.
2. **Show That You're Listening:** Use nonverbal cues such as nodding, maintaining eye contact and leaning slightly forward.
3. **Reflect and Paraphrase:** Repeat back what the speaker has said in your own words to show understanding and clarify any confusion.
4. **Avoid Interrupting:** Let the speaker finish their thoughts before you respond. Interrupting can make them feel unheard.
5. **Ask Open-Ended Questions:** Encourage the speaker to elaborate by asking questions that require more than a yes or no answer.
6. **Provide Feedback:** Share your thoughts and feelings about what the speaker has said, but do so respectfully and thoughtfully.
7. **Stay Neutral and Non-Judgmental:** Keep an open mind and avoid making judgments or offering unsolicited advice.
8. **Summarize:** At the end of the conversation, summarize the main points to ensure mutual understanding.

Consensus Making

In *Holding Space: A Guide to Mindful Facilitation*, Kate Ebner and Izzy Martens offer several insightful tips for consensus-making:

1. **Create a Safe Environment:** Ensure that everyone feels comfortable and respected, fostering open and honest communication.
2. **Practice Mindfulness:** Stay present and attentive during discussions, which helps in understanding different perspectives.
3. **Encourage Participation:** Actively invite input from all participants, ensuring that every voice is heard.
4. **Facilitate with Neutrality:** As a facilitator, remain impartial to help guide the group towards a collective decision.
5. **Use Reflective Listening:** Paraphrase and reflect back what participants say to confirm understanding and show that their contributions are valued.
6. **Identify Common Goals:** Focus on shared objectives to build a foundation for agreement.
7. **Be Patient and Flexible:** Allow the process to unfold naturally, being open to adjusting plans as needed.

The “Fist to Five” method is a participatory decision-making technique used to gauge the level of agreement within a group. Here’s how it works:

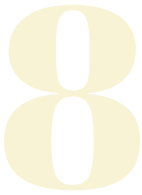
1. **Pose a Question or Proposal:** Present the topic or decision to the group.
2. **Show Your Level of Agreement:** Each participant holds up a hand showing 0 to 5 fingers:
 - a. **Fist (0 fingers):** No agreement, strong opposition.
 - b. **1 Finger:** Serious concerns, needs more discussion.
 - c. **2 Fingers:** Some reservations, but open to persuasion.
 - d. **3 Fingers:** Neutral, can go either way.
 - e. **4 Fingers:** Agreement with minor reservations.
 - f. **5 Fingers:** Full agreement, strong support.
3. **Gauge the Room:** The facilitator observes the range of responses to understand the group’s overall stance.
4. **Address Concerns:** If there are fists or low numbers, the facilitator can invite those participants to share their concerns and discuss possible solutions.
5. **Reassess:** After addressing concerns, the group can repeat the process to see if consensus has improved.

Conflict Management

Key tips for conflict management from Ann Garrido's book *Redeeming Conflict*:

1. **Practice Empathic Listening:** Engage in "Pentecost listening," where you listen deeply and empathetically, even if you disagree.
2. **Seek Understanding:** Focus on understanding the other person's perspective rather than just defending your own.
3. **Stay Curious:** Approach conflicts with curiosity and an open mind, asking questions to gain more insight.
4. **Speak Directly:** Address conflicts directly and honestly, avoiding passive-aggressive behavior.
5. **Know Yourself:** Be aware of your own triggers and biases to prevent becoming defensive.
6. **Use Spiritual Companions:** Draw inspiration from historical spiritual figures who exemplified conflict resolution.

These habits can help transform conflicts into opportunities for growth and deeper understanding.



SECTION 8: Plan Creation

Communication Strategy
Monthly Timeline
All Things New Plan Template
All Things New Plan Sample

Communication Strategy

Introduction

This communication strategy is designed to guide the ACC Planning Committee in effectively communicating the vision, objectives and process of the *All Things New* planning process to all parishioners and stakeholders.

Stakeholders include those attending Mass regularly, the homebound, those registered but may not attend regularly and others in the community who may be impacted by the planning process.

Through strategic and clear communication, the purpose of this section is to help ACC Planning Committees to inform, engage, unite and strengthen our Area Catholic Communities by demonstrating transparency, fostering trust and encouraging active participation throughout the process.

1.

Identify a communications point person

First, identify a communications point person. This person will synthesize the messages and coordinate the various ways in which the messages can and should be shared. It does not mean this person has to be the spokesperson.

As communications point person, your role includes:

- **Informing parishioners:** Ensure clarity and understanding about the goals, vision and initiatives of the pastoral plan. This includes communicating the why, what and how of the plan – why it's important, what it entails and how it will impact the community.
- **Building unity and support:** Encourage collaboration and foster a sense of shared responsibility across multiple parishes and communities in achieving the common mission of the diocese and Church.
- **Inspiring Action:** Motivate parishioners, church leaders and volunteers to actively participate in the implementation of the pastoral plan and to support the initiatives outlined within it.
- **Seeking Feedback and Involvement:** Create channels for ongoing feedback, allowing parishioners and leaders to voice their opinions and contribute their insights to the plan's execution.

Once the person is identified, that person should evaluate the methods of communication available in the ACC.

2.

What to communicate:

Clear, concise messages should be communicated through multiple channels so that there's no ambiguity about what the plan entails and why it's important.

It is recommended that communication happens at least monthly, even if there isn't a lot to share. Keep the process in front of people and remind them that it is happening. Be concise, clear and accurate in what you share. More frequent messages may be needed as new information develops.

Pray: The diocese created a beautiful prayer that can be prayed together as a community and/or shared in your bulletin. A free downloadable prayer card is available on the diocesan website under the tab ALL THINGS NEW, along with multiple other resources.

Diocesan updates: Each month, the planning office sends out an e-newsletter with updates, messages from leadership, homily helps, intercessory prayers, bulletin announcements, podcasts and more. Use these links and messages to complement your individualized updates in your ACC. Make sure your team is subscribed to this newsletter for all the latest planning information at <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/sl/Ds3PGus/allthingsnewnewsletter>.

Individualized messages: At the end of your ACC Planning Team meetings, set aside time to discuss as a team what needs to be communicated and determine who the audience is. The communications point person should coordinate how the message needs to be communicated and should contact the appropriate entities.

3.

How to communicate:

These are optional tools for communicating the plan. Each ACC team will discern together what resources are available to effectively communicate with its constituents. Keep it simple and clear. Share progress, announcements and next steps.

Use the resources you have available first:

- **Bulletins and flyers** are cost effective and efficient ways to share important information and updates with parishioners who may not have easy access to digital platforms. Communicate at least monthly, or as needed during key points in the process.
- **Intercessions, group prayer, in-Mass announcements.** The diocese provides a monthly list of intercessory prayers and bulletin announcements. These messages can supplement ACC updates or be tailored to your specific ACC. Consider asking a spokesperson and/or pastor to provide updates at an appropriate time at Mass and other events.
- **Email and e-newsletters.** Digital communication is an essential and easy way to communicate updates. It may also be a way to encourage parishioners to sign up for email updates.
- **Website and/or parish apps/online portals.** Create a central hub for all relevant resources, documents, meeting notes and updates. This allows for easy access to information for all stakeholders.
- **Town Hall or community meetings.** At some point, you may choose to offer open forums for parishioners and stakeholders to ask questions, provide feedback and share concerns. This should be a team decision with the support of the pastor. It is recommended to reserve this option for key milestones or when feedback is needed on significant decisions.
- **Social media and digital platforms.** When appropriate, social media gives an opportunity to reach a wider audience, including younger generations, to keep them informed and engaged. Posts can include updates, success stories and information about upcoming events.

Consider who you aren't reaching. Who needs to know this information and might not be using these channels? Does a letter need to be sent to homes/homebound/community partners who might be impacted by this process? What is the best way to effectively reach all stakeholders?

4.

What not to communicate:

- Protect sensitive information like financial details, legal documents or internal strategies.
- Don't share unconfirmed information or speculation that could lead to confusion.
- Avoid personal opinions or biased viewpoints when communicating with stakeholders.
- Include relevant information while avoiding unnecessary complexity or oversharing.
- Tailor communication based on the needs and access level of your audience.

5.

Things to avoid:

- Internal conflicts between team members.
- Unconfirmed rumors about project changes.
- Personal criticisms of individuals.
- Highly technical details not relevant to the audience.
- Unrealistic deadlines or expectations for communication.

2025 Monthly Timeline for All Things New Plan Creation

March/April - Discernment and Planning

- **All Things New Committee Members Appointed**
- **Prayer & Reflection:** Begin with dedicated prayer and discernment, seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit. What is God calling us to do? Where is the Holy Spirit already at work?
- **Engage Leadership:** Meet with the Deanery Planning Facilitator Team and All Things New Committee members.
- **Walk through member and plan expectations:** Use guidebook to share key responsibilities, guiding principles, design parameters and SMART goal plan creation.
- **Understand Current Reality:** Review current reality data including number of households, parish sacramental, financial health and building data.

April/May - Discernment and Planning

- **Prayer and Reflection:** Begin with dedicated prayer and discernment, seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit. What is God calling us to do? Where is the Holy Spirit already at work?
- **Name Priorities Based on Design Parameters:** Assess current ministries, infrastructure, buildings, etc. to identify areas for change based on parameters and guiding principles.
- **Identify Communication Strategy:** What methods will be used to share information? Share pertinent information with the broader parish community.
- **Establish Working Committees:** Form committees for each goal area to further develop the goal and strategy if needed.

May/June - Goal Discernment

- **Prayer and Reflection:** Begin with dedicated prayer and discernment, seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit. What is God calling us to do? Where is the Holy Spirit already at work?
- **Engage Broader Parish Participation:** Encourage parishioner involvement through various methods to ask for input on ideas and suggestions based on guiding principles and design parameters.
- **Further Goal Discernment:** Further assess current ministries, infrastructure, buildings, etc. to identify areas. Further clarify what goals are most important, spiritually and practically and how best to achieve them in a way that furthers the mission of the Church.
- **Develop Goals:** Develop draft goals and strategies for long-term impact.

July- September – Engagement and Strategy Development

- **Prayer and Reflection:** Begin with dedicated prayer and discernment, seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit. What is God calling us to do? Where is the Holy Spirit already at work?
- **Scenario Planning:** Develop multiple future scenarios. Assess how each scenario could impact the community.
- **Engage Broader Parish Participation:** Encourage parishioner involvement through ministry gatherings. Share multiple plans. Gain a sense of which plan most people may agree on.

September/October: Plan Refinement & Alignment

- **Prayer and Reflection:** Begin with dedicated prayer and discernment, seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit. What is God calling us to do? Where is the Holy Spirit already at work?
- **Refine & Adjust Plans:** Based on feedback from the ACC, adjust and refine plan.
- **Set Timelines & Milestones:** Break down each goal into actionable steps with clear deadlines. Use SMART criteria.

December: Plan Submission

- **Prayer and Reflection:** Begin with dedicated prayer and discernment, seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit. What is God calling us to do? Where is the Holy Spirit already at work?
- **Refine & Adjust Plans:** Based on continued feedback, adjust and refine plan.
- **Submit Plans:** Submit plans to the Planning Office by December 31, 2025. May have multiple options for Bishop Neary to choose from.

All Things New Plan Template

Each ACC is expected to create a plan or two to submit to the Planning Office by December 31, 2025. Each of these plans will be reviewed and will be presented to the bishop for approval.



Area Catholic Community Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Mission and Vision (Does your ACC have a Mission/Vision Statement? If yes, state it here.)

Mission Statement:

Vision Statement:

Guiding Principles:

- **Missionary Discipleship:** As baptized Catholics, we are all called to the evangelizing mission of the Church. Rooted in this mission, together we are guided by a desire to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ in the world by living and sharing a life of faith.
- **Sacramental Life:** The sacraments are outward signs of grace that God gives to people to help them live a life close to Jesus. We are guided by an invitation to the full, conscious and active participation of the faithful in sacramental life and prayer of the Church.
- **Engaging the Laity:** God has given each person a unique set of gifts and charisms to live out their individual vocation. Through revitalized prayer and formation opportunities, encounters with family, friends, co-workers and neighbors, we can welcome new faces into the fold. We are guided by our strengths to stimulate renewal in the Church.
- **Listening as a Way of Being Church:** The Holy Spirit calls us to pray, listen and discern together what God is asking of us today. By listening to each other, we are guided by learning to best respond to the spiritual needs of all people in our diocese.
- **Prudent Stewardship:** All our resources – human, structural, financial – are gifts from God. With a deep sense of gratitude, we are guided by the use of resources to achieve our shared mission in a healthy and responsible way.

Design Parameters:

- Accessibility to Sunday Liturgy
- Budgeted Ministries
- Buildings
- Pastors/Priests
- Governance
- Finances

2. Goals for the ACC

SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) must be used for each goal while ensuring alignment with the guiding principles and focus on the areas of the design parameters that fit the ACC to reach the goal. The goals should reflect the guiding principles and action steps should reflect the parameters.

Goal 1: Based on the Guiding Principles

Specific:

Measurable:

Achievable:

Relevant:

Time-bound:

Action steps

1. Action step
2. Action step
3. Action step
4. Action step

Goal 2: Based on the Guiding Principles

Specific:

Measurable:

Achievable:

Relevant:

Time-bound:

Action steps

1. Action step
2. Action step
3. Action step
4. Action step

Approval and Sign-Off

Date:

Pastor:

Other Committee Members

All Things New Plan Template Sample

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- **Engaging the Laity:** God has given each person a unique set of gifts and charisms to live out their individual vocation. Through revitalized prayer and formation opportunities, encounters with family, friends, co-workers and neighbors, we can welcome new faces into the fold. We are guided by our strengths to stimulate renewal in the Church.
- **Listening as a Way of Being Church:** The Holy Spirit calls us to pray, listen and discern together what God is asking of us today. By listening to each other, we are guided by learning to best respond to the spiritual needs of all people in our diocese.
- **Prudent Stewardship:** All our resources – human, structural, financial – are gifts from God. With a deep sense of gratitude, we are guided by the use of resources to achieve our shared mission in a healthy and responsible way.

Design Parameters:

- Accessibility to Sunday Liturgy
- Budgeted Ministries
- Buildings
- Pastors/Priests
- Governance
- Finances

2. Goals for the ACC

SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) must be used for each goal while ensuring alignment with the guiding principles and focus on the areas of the design parameters that fit the ACC to reach the goal. The goals should reflect the guiding principles and action steps should reflect the parameters.

Goal 1: Use Prudent Stewardship by Balancing the ACC Budget

- **Specific:** Implement a balanced budget that includes the expected ministries
- **Measurable:** Budget will be structured to maintain a 10% operating surplus with financial reports tracking income and expenditures
- **Achievable:** Through improved financial planning, increased stewardship, and expense management, the ACC will achieve a balanced budget within six months
- **Relevant:** A balanced budget will ensure the ACC can continue to provide liturgical services, community outreach and faith formation while maintaining financial stability
- **Time-bound:** The finance council will finalize and implement the balanced budget within six months, with quarterly reports to track progress

6-Month Action Steps

Month 1: Assessment and Planning:

Conduct a financial audit of the past 2-3 years.

- Identify income sources (tithes, donations, fundraising, rentals, etc.).
- List all fixed and variable expenses.
- Form a budget committee with key parish leaders.

Month 2: Budget Drafting and Income Strategy

- Draft a preliminary balanced budget.
- Evaluate and improve stewardship programs to increase donations.
- Review fundraising activities and outreach to increase parish revenue.

Month 3: Expense Review and Optimization

- Identify areas for cost-cutting (e.g., utility savings, bulk purchasing, volunteer involvement).
- Negotiate contracts with vendors for better rates.
- Implement expense tracking measures.

Month 4: Implementation and Communication

- Approve and finalize the budget.
- Communicate financial goals with parishioners through bulletins, meetings and homilies.
- Launch fundraising initiatives and stewardship campaigns.

Month 5: Monitoring and Adjustments

- Conduct a mid-year financial review.
- Adjust budget allocations if needed.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of income-generating efforts.

Month 6: Final Review and Long-term Planning

- Assess the success of the balanced budget.
- Plan for long-term sustainability strategies.
- Provide a financial transparency report to the parish community.

2.Goal: Improve Sacramental Life

- **Specific:** Improve sacramental participation
- **Measurable:** Occupancy will be 50% or higher for all weekend liturgies
- **Achievable:** By transitioning to fewer Masses, we will see a measurable increase in occupancy across the ACC
- **Relevant:** Parishioners may experience a more robust and vibrant liturgy which builds engagement and a sense of community
- **Time-bound:** The number of Masses and parish corporations will be reduced by July 1, 2026

Action Steps

Phase 1: Assessment and Planning (March 2025 - December 2025)

- **June - August 2025:**
 - Gather feedback through surveys, town hall meetings and consultations.
 - Analyze data and identify parishes with low attendance and sustainability challenges.
 - Define initial consolidation scenarios and options for optimizing Mass schedules.
- **September - December 2025:**
 - Finalize a draft proposal for parish mergers and Mass reductions.
 - Communicate findings and recommendations to parishioners.
 - Gather final feedback and make necessary adjustments.

Phase 2: Implementation Preparation (January 2026 - June 2026)

- **January 2026- March 2026:**
 - Announce decisions regarding parish mergers and Mass schedules.
 - Develop transition plans, including financial, legal and pastoral considerations.
 - Begin reassigning clergy and lay leadership responsibilities.
- **April - June 2026:**
 - Offer support programs for affected parish communities (pastoral care, counseling, spiritual formation).
 - Develop a communications plan to ensure smooth transitions.
 - Establish lay ministry training programs to increase engagement in liturgical and parish life.

Phase 3: Implementation & Transition (July 2026 - December 2026)

- **July - September 2026:**

- Begin consolidation of Masses according to the approved plan.
- Close or repurpose parish buildings as necessary, ensuring smooth transitions.
- Implement lay leadership training programs to support new parish structures.

- **October - December 2026:**

- Monitor the impact of changes on parish engagement, sacramental participation and financial sustainability.
- Address any concerns or logistical issues that arise from the transition.

Phase 4: Evaluation & Adjustments (January 2027 - July 2027)

- **January - March 2027:**

- Conduct a formal review of the consolidation process.
- Gather feedback from clergy, lay leaders and parishioners to assess effectiveness.
- Identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments.

- **April - July 2027:**

- Finalize structural changes and ensure stability in the new parish model.
- Develop a long-term sustainability plan.
- Celebrate the transition with a renewed focus on sacramental life and lay engagement.

Approval and Sign-Off

Date:

Pastor:

Other Committee Members

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SECTION 9: ACC and Parish Data

Emmaus Partners Catholic Mutual Appraisals Historical and Architectural Summary

Data-informed decision-making in pastoral planning is vital for ensuring the effective stewardship of resources and the spiritual growth of the community. By analyzing Mass attendance counts, sacramental trends, historical and architectural significance, and building appraisals, church leaders can make informed choices about parish sustainability, facility maintenance, and ministry priorities. This data helps assess community engagement, forecast future needs, and guide decisions. Ultimately, integrating data into pastoral planning ensures that decisions are mission-driven and financially responsible so the church community fosters a vibrant and responsive church community. Three pieces of data will be provided as appendices to help the committee discern.

Appendix A:

Emmaus Partners (*an outside consulting firm*) will provide parish profiles and financials.

Appendix B:

Catholic Mutual will provide a short building assessment for each building in our diocese.

Appendix C:

Fr. Joseph Backowski will provide a summary regarding the historical and architectural significance of each church in our diocese based on objective research.



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