

*Bishop Patrick Neary.*

*“Let us begin savoring these words of the Prophet Isaiah that capture so well what the Holy Spirit is saying to us this night: ‘Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?’ From the beginning, I have said that All Things New is not simply a restructuring effort. It is about spiritual renewal, about something new. It is an invitation to look honestly at who we are as a Church today and to discern how the Holy Spirit is calling us to grow, to adapt, and to strengthen our mission for the future. Our goal is simple: to ensure that parish life remains vibrant, sustainable, and rooted in the Gospel for generations to come.*

*Shortly after my ordination, as I began to understand the landscape of our Diocese, I was stunned to learn that Saint Cloud ranked fourth worst in the nation in the disproportion between the number of parishes and the number of active priests. I had never served in a diocese where a pastor was responsible for three, five, or even eight parishes. As I visited our priests, I saw the toll this was taking – the fatigue, the stress, the sense that they could not fully know their people. Younger priests shared their fear that such a pace was unsustainable for a lifetime of ministry. As their bishop and spiritual father, I knew something had to change.*

*Over the past months, our planning team and the local leaders in every ACC have worked tirelessly to gather information, listen deeply, and represent the voices of the people they serve. Every ACC is unique, and that is precisely why I chose a synodal approach rather than handing down decisions without your input. The development of our ACCs has already helped us move beyond what I call a “silo mentality,” reminding us that we are one family in Christ.*

*So where are we now?*

*At this moment, we are doing the detailed work of taking your ACC plans and translating them into the language of Canon Law. I know that law can feel intimidating or frustrating, especially when emotions are involved. But Church law exists for a reason. As Pope St. John Paul II taught, the Code of Canon Law is necessary because the Church is a visible, social body. It protects the rights of each member, ensures justice rooted in charity, and helps us live as one family in Christ. In my own words: we are not just one person or one parish – we are a whole family. And families need rules that protect each member and prevent anyone from being treated unjustly.*

*Beginning this past week, and continuing over the coming weeks, decrees will be issued one at a time for each parish merger proposed by the ACC Planning Councils and recommended to me. While these decrees may appear “final,” Canon Law provides a period in which any member of the Faithful may petition me to modify or even revoke a decision. I welcome such petitions. I intend to listen prayerfully to the Holy Spirit speaking through them. I want to act with Christ-like charity.*

*I know that change can be difficult. It can stir up grief, uncertainty, and even fear. But I want you to know that we are not doing this alone. The Holy Spirit is guiding us. We are following this careful, consultative process not to diminish parish life, but to strengthen it. We want every community to be*

*a place where people encounter Christ, where they are formed as disciples, and where they are sent out to share the Gospel. This night Jesus says to each of us, his chosen disciples: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me."*

*In this Easter season, I am reminded of my episcopal motto: Ave Crux, Spes Unica – "Hail the Cross, Our Only Hope." In this process, we will experience both the cross and the hope it brings. But we do not grieve as people without hope. Christ is risen. He walks with us, just as He walked with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, opening their eyes in the breaking of the bread.*

*We must also broaden our understanding of the Church. St. Teresa of Calcutta once said, "The Church is you and I." The early Christians had no buildings, yet they transformed the world through their love, their integrity, and their care for the poor. May people say of us what they said of them: "See how they love one another."*

*I recently saw a message painted on the wall of a church gathering space: "If nothing ever changed, there would be no butterflies." From this day forward, we walk together in unity – joyfully, side by side – trusting that Christ walks with us until we reach the end of this journey.*

*It is my sincere hope that the fruits of All Things New will be abundant: that all will feel welcomed in any church they enter; that new friendships will form; that our liturgies will be vibrant and uplifting; that our priests will breathe more easily; and that our ACC staff will feel supported and affirmed. Above all, may we grow in faith, hope, and love, remembering always that we are one Body in Christ."*

*(May 3<sup>d</sup>, 2026. At Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Sauk Rapids, MN)*