

Greetings,

This letter is written with a heavy heart. As you know, over the past nine months the Bishop, along with his Pastoral Committee, has called for a new “All Things New” planning process. This process called for a reduction in church buildings with the goal of combating the alarming statistics that we face as Catholics in our diocese, along with being good stewards of finances.

Since 2010, Mass attendance has declined by 33%, weddings have declined by 45%, baptisms by 45%, and confirmations by 35%. But the most alarming statistic is the limited number of priests. Currently, there are 62 priests serving 131 parishes, with that number dropping to 52 in the next ten years. To add to this problem, this current year we will have no new priestly ordinations and no young men entering the seminary as well.

In order to combat these statistics, the Diocese gave each ACC a list of parameters to use to determine which church buildings could close to better align with the diocesan goal of reducing the number of buildings. The parameters were not “one size fits all,” but rather a place for each ACC to start. Each ACC has unique challenges that call for some ACCs to be affected differently than others, so we cannot compare every approved plan to ours.

With this in mind, the Committee for the Affirmation of Plans has affirmed a plan to close Our Lady of the Angels in Sauk Centre, St. Alexius in West Union, and St. Donatus in Brooten. This has not been officially approved by the Bishop. We recognize that these closures are deeply felt and may seem like the Diocese is focusing solely on financial aspects. However, the primary goal is to adapt to changing demographics in rural communities and prepare for the future.

The Diocese believes that these changes will foster healthier communities, priests, budgets, and liturgies. Though we acknowledge the pain and frustration that come with change, we trust that these plans will help build a stronger Church for future generations.

Each existing church welcomes you. In fact, they need you as well to bring your gifts of time, talent, and resources to remain operational. Volunteering in a new church is the best way to gain new friends and familiarity with the

community. We need lectors, sacristans, ushers, greeters, musicians, servers, and other volunteers to serve as the feet and hands of Christ.

Our faith is centered on the sacraments. As a Catholic, you are blessed to have Jesus Christ living in you in the Eucharist and to have access to His grace through the other sacraments. Let us continue to remind ourselves and each other of that blessing. Jesus is our head, and we are His Body. He is leading us to walk in uncharted and unfamiliar territory, but we are confident that His grace goes before us. This is our hope. This is our peace.

May God bless each and every one of you,

Fr. Kevin and Fr. Mark.