



All Things New

Mary, Mother of the Church

1. Mission

Mission Statement:

Making Disciples of Jesus by the witness of a living faith.

2. Praenotanda

A. Introductory Context

The formational and extant fruit of Mary, Mother of the Church Area Catholic Community (Mary's ACC) is rich. Common knowledge of inexorable structural change and felt opportunity costs yields continually growing inter-parish cooperation and acceptance of joint governance, planning and activities. Cooperative inter-parish activities, such as youth, formation, women's and men's groups, and joint Masses bolster unitive convergence. Moreover, financial opportunities and employee transitions organically facilitated the merger of our two business offices. The community regularly intones its desires to keep the unitive and cooperative aspects of the ACC.

All Things New introduced reticence primarily rooted in anticipatory grief, identity, culture, history and communal losses. This has led to stagnation, preservationism, distrust of sister parishes and angst.

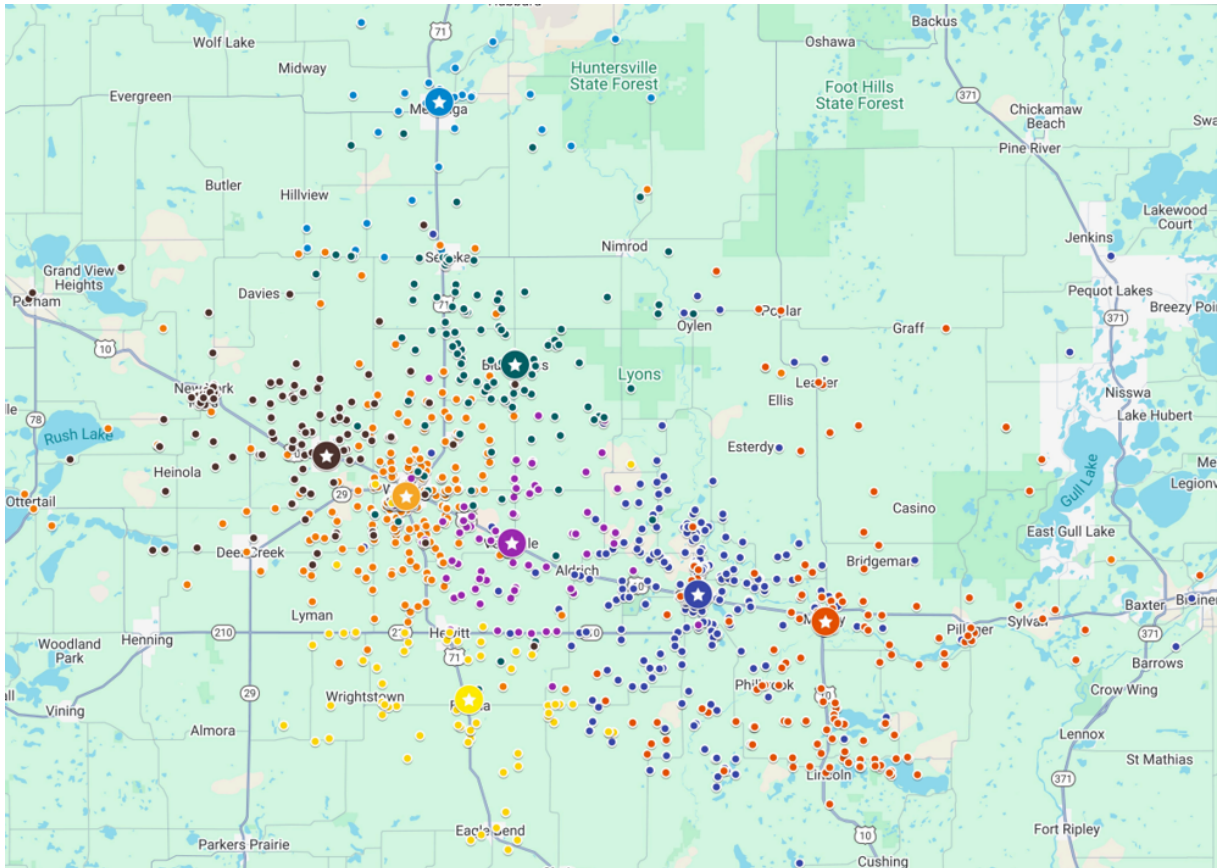
B. Parish Communication

The initial public introduction of Bishop's *All Things New* initiative occurred at an ACC-wide Town Hall on June 10, 2025. Resultant questions were obtained in written form. Some questions were immediately addressed and others were addressed, or readdressed, as bulletin material. This initial meeting and the bulletin announcements also highlighted the location of additional *All Things New* material on our ACC's website. From that website, the diocesan information was linked. The pastor and vicars also occasionally spoke of the process after the Eucharist or during a homily. Facebook videos augmented the process and met the expressed desire for greater transparency.

Posters and bulletin inserts containing each *All Things New* committee member's image, parish name and contact information invited individuals to make contact with any committee member.

The proposed plans, and related material, was offered to the ACC in two town hall style meetings. As in the initial round of presentations, written responses were collected. These meetings occurred on Tuesday, October 21, 2025 at St Ann's in Wadena, MN and Saturday, October 25, 2025 at Sacred Heart in Staples, MN. At these final meetings, the *All Things New* Committee specifically asked for assistance answering building repurposing questions.

C. Assumptions



This population map of ACC households undergirds all plan development. The bulk of our population resides within 20 minute of the U.S. Hwy 10 corridor.

Hispanic Population: As no parish within Mary's ACC approaches or exceeds the specified Hispanic population threshold of 10%, this assessment parameter was excluded from treatment.

Business Administrator: This ACC currently operates with a single business administrator and a single main business office in Wadena, MN. Thus, this parameter will not receive significant treatment.

Building Utilization: As all parishes currently comply with the 24” wide pew utilization calculation and requirements, it follows that this parameter need not be revisited in proposed plans.

Parish	Total Households	Total Parishioners 2024	Seating Capacity (24"/pp)	Weekly Avg Attendance 2024	Occupancy
Assumption of Our Lady - Menahga	48	93	60	34	57%
Sacred Heart - Staples	348	868	440	271	62%
St. Ann - Wadena	478	952	445	269	60%
St. Fredrick - Verndale	101	210	150	131	87%
St. Hubert - Bluegrass	134	325	163	123	75%
St. John the Baptist - Bluffton	169	368	324	165	51%
St. Joseph - Bertha	85	287	170	132	78%
St. Michael - Motley	175	413	220	186	85%

School: Conversations with Sara Michaelson, St. Cloud Diocese Superintend of Schools and acting on behalf of Bishop Patrick Neary, CSC, suggested the inclusion of the Sacred Heart Area School in this document.

D. Current Mis-Alignment With Bishop's Parameters

	Bertha	Bluegrass	Bluffton	Menahga	Motley	Staples	Verndale	Wadena
Overall facility usage must average 50% occupancy or higher for all weekend liturgies in the ACC	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Building Accessibility								
Restrooms in church building	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Church building is either one level or has access to an existing elevator	No	Partial	YES	Partial	YES	YES	YES	YES
Hispanic ministries with 10% of the total census population	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Social outreach, Special Needs (SJ), Good Samaritan (SA), Love Inc (SJB), CARE (SM and SHC)	YES	No	YES	No	YES	YES	No	YES
Each finance council will approve an attainable and reasonable annual balanced budget	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Parish investment in Catholic school may not exceed 40% of plate/envelope within five years	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Routine building operations may not exceed 25% of plate/envelope	YES	YES	No	YES	YES	YES	No	YES
80% of the faithful must have access to a Sunday Mass within a 20-minute drive.	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
No rotation of Mass schedules between churches.	YES	No	YES	YES	No	YES	YES	YES

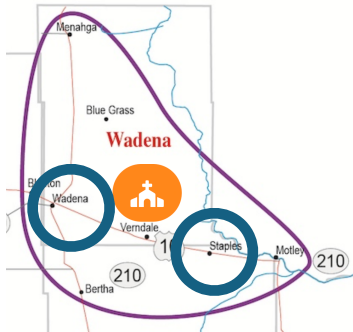
E. Consequence of Mis-Alignment With Bishop's Parameters

The physical and geographical realities of Mary, Mother of the Church ACC make it impossible to be fully compliant with Bishop's parameters.

3. Plan Detail

A. Rejected Plans

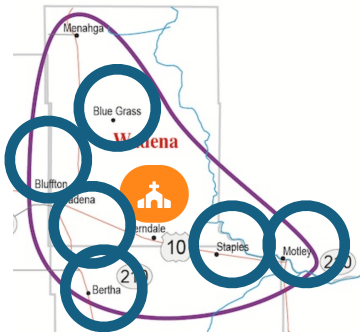
The listening and deliberative process produced a multiplicity of planning possibilities. Utilizing the *Bishop's Parameters* and the general perceived willingness to change, four plans received considerable assessment and treatment. Of these, the first two were rejected:



Wadena & Staples (Merge all other 6 parishes)

Reasoning: Heeding parishioner equity concerns, this plan eliminated anticipated charges of geographical and parish favoritism. A Vigil and two Sunday Masses at each location meets capacity needs.

Rejection: This plan's aggressiveness, likelihood of separating the ACC into two, and its inadequate adherence to Bishop's "80%" parameter¹, rendered this option moot.



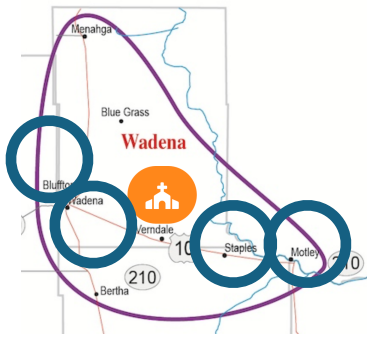
Six Parish ACC (Merge parishes in Menahga & Verndale)

Reasoning: Selecting the lowest attendance and adherent numbers, Assumption of Our Lady in Menahga and St. Frederick in Verndale were proposed for merger. Popularly proposed by the laity of the ACC, this is the "least damage plan."

Rejection: This plan constricts meaningful parish reinvigoration. The plan's minor operational impact precludes significant cultural, financial, catechetical, and missionary discipleship change. Moreover, the human capital and financial change delta are also insufficient.

¹ Here, Bishop's parameter requires that "80% of the faithful must have access to Sunday Mass within a 20-minute drive."

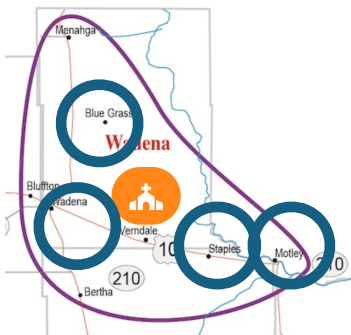
B. Proposed Plans



HwY 10 Plan (Merge Parishes in Bertha, Blue Grass, Menahga and Verndale)

Reasoning: Although this plan narrowly runs afoul of Bishop’s “80%” parameter, the population centers served by this plan negate the low number of residents impacted by the near violation of the “80%” rule in the Blue Grass area.² Moreover, the remaining parishes are the most accessible parishes.³

If the number of parishioners attending Mass remains comparable to current numbers, holding Vigil and Sunday Masses at both Sacred Heart (Staples) and St. Ann (Wadena), and one Sunday Mass at both St. John the Baptist (Bluffton) and St. Michael (Motley), the occupancy fulfill Bishop’s occupancy parameter.



Land Plan (Merge Parishes in Bertha, Bluffton, Menahga and Verndale)

Reasoning: Although this plan complies with Bishop’s “80%” parameter, St. Hubert’s in Blue Grass is not complaint with the accessibility parameter. The entry/church level lift does not reach the basement.⁴ The building’s layout precludes modification of the current lift and necessitates an exterior addition.⁵

If the number of parishioners attending Mass remains the same in the ACC, holding two Masses at both Sacred Heart (Staples) and St. Ann (Wadena), and one Mass at both St. Hubert (Bluegrass) and St. Michael (Motley) would meet the occupancy parameter.

² See #1 above.

³ As specified in Bishop’s requirement that “Church buildings must be physically accessible, hospitable and safe.”

⁴ See #3 above.

⁵ As St. Joseph the Worker in Bertha is impacted by the non-accessibility parameter, this decision may require discussion centering on accessibility.

The “Hwy 10” plan and the “Land Plan” appear ideal for further treatment. However, both alternative buildings present an achilles’ heal of high operating costs (St. John The Baptist, Bluffton) and partial accessibility (St. Hubert, Blue Grass).⁶

C. “Hwy-10” and “Land” Plan Specifics

	Hwy 10 Plan	Land Plan
Accessibility to Sunday Liturgy	Proposed Schedule <u>Saturday</u> Staples Wadena <u>Sunday</u> Bluffton Motley Staples Wadena We anticipate the Pastoral Council’s scheduling assistance. Accessibility Accessibility: 100% Compliance. <u>80% Rule: Near compliance (as stated above)</u> Mass Rotation None	Proposed Schedule <u>Saturday</u> Staples Wadena <u>Sunday</u> Blue Grass Motley Staples Wadena We anticipate the Pastoral Council’s scheduling assistance. Accessibility Accessibility: Near compliance (as stated above) <u>80% Rule: 100% Compliance</u> Mass Rotation None

⁶ St. John the Baptist’s fuel oil costs contribute significantly to cost imbalances. St. Hubert’s lift connects the entry and the church level, but the building design precludes this lift from accessing the basement. To make St. Hubert’s accessible, an exterior lift and structure are required.

	Hwy 10 Plan	Land Plan
Governance	Corporation Numbers One parish corporation formed through an <i>extinctive union</i> . In both plans, we are proposing that all eight parishes merge into one parish. The new proposed parish name will be selected by the people after Bishop’s announcement. We are awaiting guidance on the technical aspects of mergers.	Corporation Numbers One parish corporation formed through an <i>extinctive union</i> . In both plans, we are proposing that all eight parishes merge into one parish. The new proposed parish name will be selected by the people after Bishop’s announcement. We are awaiting guidance on the technical aspects of mergers.
	Continue the unified faith formation program.	Continue the unified faith formation program.
	Church Pairing <u>Primary</u> <u>Secondary</u> St. Ann’s St. John the Bap Sacred Heart St. Michael	Church Pairing <u>Primary</u> <u>Secondary</u> St. Ann’s St. Hubert Sacred Heart St. Michael
	Responding to experience with the reduced staff presence in Staples, we anticipate maintaining secretarial support in the Staples office.	Responding to experience with the reduced staff presence in Staples, we anticipate maintaining secretarial support in the Staples office.
Finances	Attainable Budgets All ACC parishes currently maintain a balanced budget. Given the reduced expenditures and accounting simplification, we anticipate continuing the balancing of budgets. As St. John the Baptist’s expenditures exceed that of St. Hubert, this plan incurs additional expenditures when compared to the <i>Land Plan</i> .	Attainable Budgets All ACC parishes currently maintain a balanced budget. Given the reduced expenditures and accounting simplification, we anticipate continuing the balancing of budgets.
	Building Expenses < 25% Bluffton currently fails this assessment. However, as we anticipate razing the rectory, this percentage will likely change to the better.	Building Expenses < 25% 100 % Compliance

	Hwy 10 Plan	Land Plan
Buildings	Over 50% Occupancy 100% Compliance Physically Accessible 100% Compliance Proposed Building Repurposing Over the next few months, we intend to continue garnering input from the ACC regarding proposed building disposition or continued usage. Menahga: Sell to interested party. Wevley Funeral Home currently owns half of the parking lot. Absent immediate interest, we intend to sell the property by July 2028. Verndale: If it makes operation sense, we hope to keep the facility as a central location for Eucharistic Adoration, youth activities, Catholic store, homeschool center, and missionary center. If financial viability precludes this option, we intend to sell the property before June 2031. Bertha: Sell the Rectory and shed. Contact the City of Bertha to evaluate childcare usage. If this option fails, raze or sell the Church building by June 2029. Bluegrass: Evaluate the property, including the wooded areas, for retreat usage. If financial viability precludes this option, we intend to sell the property before June 2031.	Over 50% Occupancy 100% Compliance Physically Accessible St. Hubert is not compliant. Elevator from entrance to church level, but no elevator to church basement (See above). Building Repurposing Over the next few months, we intend to continue garnering input from the ACC regarding proposed building disposition or continued usage. Menahga: Sell to interested party. Wevley Funeral Home currently owns half of the parking lot. Absent immediate interest, we intend to sell the property by July 2028. Verndale: If it makes operation sense, we hope to keep the facility as a central location for Eucharistic Adoration, youth activities, Catholic store, homeschool center, and missionary center. If financial viability precludes this option, we intend to sell the property before June 2031. Bertha: Sell the Rectory and shed. Contact the City of Bertha to evaluate childcare usage. If this option fails, raze or sell the Church building by June 2029. Bluffton: We intend to move or raze the Rectory by Fall 2027. We also intend to raze the church building and remove the parking lot surface. These properties will be added to the cemetery.

	Hwy 10 Plan	Land Plan
Budgeted Ministries	One Administrative Office Complete (Sept 2025) One Business Administrator Complete (Sept 2021) Liturgical Ministries Complete: Liturgical Leader Hired (2014) Formation Ministries Complete: Continue Joint ACC wide youth groups and youth minister. Complete: Continue youth formation as per current joint and separate ministry. (October 2025) Pastoral Care Increased priestly availability through: 1) Decreased meeting time 2) Currently developing shut-in visitation program 3) We intend to utilize extra funds to hire a part time pastoral associate (deacon, lay, or parish nurse) to specifically assist with elder visitation and inclusion. Social Outreach We hope to hire a part time Social Outreach / Evangelism Pastoral Associate to promote Christ, the Church and to remind all leaders and staff of their evangelistic participation.	One Administrative Office Complete (Sept 2025) One Business Administrator Complete (Sept 2021) Liturgical Ministries Complete: Liturgical Leader Hired (2014) Formation Ministries Complete: Continue Joint ACC wide youth groups and youth minister. Complete: Continue youth formation as per current joint and separate ministry. (October 2025) Pastoral Care Increased priestly availability through: 1) Decreased meeting time 2) Currently developing shut-in visitation program 3) We intend to utilize extra funds to hire a part time pastoral associate (deacon, lay, or parish nurse) to specifically assist with elder visitation and inclusion. Social Outreach We hope to hire a part time Social Outreach / Evangelism Pastoral Associate to promote Christ, the Church and to remind all leaders and staff of their evangelistic participation.

	Hwy 10 Plan	Land Plan
Pastors/Priests	Assignment We know that the assigned priests will contract to 2 in June 2026. Depending on the cooperative capacity of the assigned priests, we desire our two priests to serve <i>in sodium as per Canon 517.1</i>. One priest will serve in Staples and the other in Wadena. This will afford the laity requested solidity, but it also clarifies territorial assignments between the pastors, such as weddings, funerals, baptisms, etc. But, this rotation still affords any laity access to both priests. Each priest would also take on principal joint areas of ACC responsibility. E.g., the moderator pastor may take on administration, and the other pastor may assume sacramental and catechetical formation responsibilities. 50 % Pastoral Time requirement The proposed split of responsibilities, coupled with corporate complexity reduction should result in additional pastoral time for each priest. Mass Schedule The proposed Mass schedule is compliant with Bishop's priestly Mass guidelines. Retired priests are not needed to augment the ordinary Mass schedule. Living Arrangements This depends on the June 2026 priestly assignments. If Fr. JC remains, his living arrangements preclude cooperative priestly living. We desire to post cooperatively operating priests on both sides of the ACC. This allows for greater priestly accessibility and routines.	Assignment We know that the assigned priests will contract to 2 in June 2026. Depending on the cooperative capacity of the assigned priests, we desire our two priests to serve <i>in sodium as per Canon 517.1</i>. One priest will serve in Staples and the other in Wadena. This will afford the laity requested solidity, but it also clarifies territorial assignments between the pastors, such as weddings, funerals, baptisms, etc. But, this rotation still affords any laity access to both priests. Each priest would also take on principal joint areas of ACC responsibility. E.g., the moderator pastor may take on administration, and the other pastor may assume sacramental and catechetical formation responsibilities. 50 % Pastoral Time requirement The proposed split of responsibilities, coupled with corporate complexity reduction should result in additional pastoral time for each priest. Mass Schedule The proposed Mass schedule is compliant with Bishop's priestly Mass guidelines. Retired priests are not needed to augment the ordinary Mass schedule. Living Arrangements This depends on the June 2026 priestly assignments. If Fr. JC remains, his living arrangements preclude cooperative priestly living. We desire to post cooperatively operating priests on both sides of the ACC. This allows for greater priestly accessibility and routines.

4. School

A. Introduction

After consulting with Sara Michaelson, the District Superintendent of the Diocese of St Cloud, Sacred Heart Area School (SHAS) is being added to our All Things New planning process.

B. Leadership Background

The school currently operates with an interim principal, who has agreed to serve a singular academic year. Thus, the SHAS experienced a recent principal turnover of 5 principals in 8 years or an average term of 1.6 years. During this time, the pastor turnover of four priests added leadership complexity. Utilization of retired priests acting as parochial administrators further exacerbated leadership difficulties.

C. Facilities

SHAS's non-accessible building fails to meet food service code and ADA compliance. Electrical circuits are at capacity, causing problems when concurrently operating customary equipment such as copiers and pencil sharpeners. The building requires substantial internal and external revitalization and modernization.

D. Enrollment and finances

As reported on Sacred Heart's annual reports, SHAS's enrollment and finances indicate structural insufficiencies.

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26 Estimate	Average
Enrollment	68	111	95	105	87	72	41	90
% of 140 Capacity	48.6%	79.3%	67.9%	75.0%	62.1%	51.4%	29.3%	59.1%
Operating Expense in \$	489,881	523,879	500,618	566,454	697,950	739,940	525,000	577,675
Avg Cost/ Student in \$	7,204	4,720	5,270	5,395	8,022	10,277	12,805	7,670
Pre-Parish Gain in \$	-101,302	-90,725	44,125	-27,015	-155,455	-280,000 Estimated	0	-66,074

E. Parish Implications

The 2024-2025 principal difficulty and anger also impacted Sacred Heart's Mass attendance, school and parish giving, and community good-will.

F. Plan

Enrollment at SHAS should be suppressed beginning with the 2026-2027 school year.

However, we wish to utilize current endowment funds to hire a School Development Consultant to assist the pastor with assessing future redevelopment opportunities. Moreover, we are currently assessing the feasibility of retaining pre-school or forming a daycare program that will continue our commitment to students and families.

5. Timeline & Goals

- A. ATN holds listening sessions in each parish to hear the laity's input regarding building disposition and future ministries. (*Listening as a Way of Being the Church* - January 2026)
- B. ATN collaboration with Pastoral Council and Laity: Offer a combined vision of ministry that addresses liturgy, evangelism, youth, local customs and much more. (*Listening as a Way of Being the Church & Sacramental Life* - January 2026)
- C. ATN collaboration with Pastoral Council: Receive feedback on building disposition/repurposing (*Listening as a Way of Being the Church* - due March 2026)
- D. ATN collaboration with Parish Life Committees to determine property to be kept for future merger (*Engaging The Laity* - due May 2026)
- E. ATN collaboration with Pastoral Council regarding final Masses (due March 2026)
- F. ATN begin collaboration with Pastoral Council to merge/redesign groups (*Prudent Stewardship & Engaging The Laity* - inception of conversations April 2026, due July 2027)
- G. ATN collaboration with Pastoral Council: (*Sacramental Life*) Establish new Mass times
 - A. First reduction in Mass schedule due to loss of Parochial Vicar after June of 2026 (due April 2026)
 - B. Collaborate with communications to announce plans (April 2026)
 - C. Scheduled reduction in Masses after merger (May 2026)
 - D. Collaborate with communications to announce reduction in Masses plans (May 2026)

- E. Develop a strategic plan addressing the liturgical suppression of the mergers parishes, to include merging of liturgical and historical items, music, scheduling final masses/decommissioning celebrations (*Sacramental Life - May 2026*).
- H. Pastor and Business Manager develop strategic staffing plan
 - A. Initial post-merger strategic staffing plan (*Missionary Discipleship & Engaging The Laity - due May 2026*)
 - B. This includes hiring of a part-time Social Outreach / Evangelism Pastoral Associate (*Missionary Discipleship & Engaging The Laity - due June 2026*)
 - C. This includes finding a voluntary missionary activity coordinator (*Missionary Discipleship & Engaging The Laity - due June 2026*)
 - D. This includes finding a voluntary or paid elder coordinator (*Missionary Discipleship & Engaging The Laity - due June 2026*)
- I. ATN collaboration with Pastoral Council: (*Missionary Discipleship & Prudent Stewardship*) Standardize the percentage of plate collection given to social outreach (due October 2026)
- J. Plans for merging the ACC into a unified parish currently remain unknown as we await guidance from the Diocese of St. Cloud.