

## **All Things New Parish Hall - January 15, 2026 - St. Kathryn's, Ogilvie**

Father started with a prayer and introduced Brenda Kresky, head of the Planning Office of the Diocese of St. Cloud.

Brenda did an overview of the handout of statistics from our diocese and surrounding areas.

**(Audio 00:06:07)**

- St. Cloud Diocese is the 4th worst in the nation on priest to parish ratio
- 57 priests for 131 parishes (49 priests who are not of retirement age)
- Total number of baptized Catholics has gone down - in 24 years, 247,000 to 110,000
- In our parishes, registered parishioners from 2458 (in 1999) to 1137 (in 2024) - less than ½ of the numbers. Attendance is even less - 562 people in July. The capacity of our ACC churches combined is 1214.

Father and Brenda answered questions that were submitted before the meeting:

**(Audio 00:11:52)**

- Has there been an overview of the state of our church buildings? **(Audio 00:12:10)**
  - Catholic Mutual did an appraisal of all the buildings in the diocese before this All Things New process started.
- Why was the 2 Church proposal accepted? **(Audio 00:14:30)**
  - The purpose is to have 2 strong church sites. We currently have more building space than we need. We can build up these communities at these 2 sites.
- Religious Retirement Fund - what does this go to? **(Audio 00:15:32)**
  - This only goes to the religious, not to lay staff, diocesan operating expenses, or even to the [diocesan] priests' retirement. It is separate from the Christian Brothers Retirement plan.
- Why fewer parishes? **(Audio 00:17:18)**
  - This is happening all across the diocese. We need to build things up for the future, focus resources for the future.
  - There was a comment about towns deserving a Catholic presence. This is true, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they need a church. Catholics should be a witness in their town, but the church building doesn't necessarily need to be there.
  - There was a comment about how priests used to go from place to place, in a rural mission church style. Why couldn't we go back to that? Our societies function differently now. It used to take 1 hour to drive 8 miles by horse and buggy; the parameter now is a 20 minute drive for people for Mass. Are we willing to travel a little farther to get to Mass, like people used to 100 years ago?
- What is the Catholic Church doing to increase vocations? **(Audio 00:24:05)**
  - In our diocese, Fr. Doug Liebsch is the vocations director. He puts on many events, like the Andrew Dinners, Vocation Camps, Nun Rungs, etc. We currently have 13 seminarians.
  - Support for vocations can't just happen with the diocese. It also has to happen on the parish level and especially within the home. We are all active members of the body of Christ - we all have a role to play in evangelization.

Why Foreston? Why not close Milaca? **(Audio 00:27:27)**

- If you are a St. Louis parishioner, wouldn't you be happy to have an influx of people coming from Milaca, if their church were to close? Wouldn't that be good

for your parish and you would welcome them? Now, if St. Louis closes, wouldn't those good things in the other scenario also be there for Milaca?

- Some people are saying "we like our community as it is." This is not what it means to be the Body of Christ.
- Resources are stretched. Fewer sites means a potential for greater activity.
- Why is Foreston closing over Milaca? Milaca is a larger town, with a larger population. Towns are 4 miles apart - cannot keep both.
- Will Churches continue to close as priests retire? **(Audio 00:31:03)**
- Our ultimate mission is evangelization **(Audio 00:34:36)**

Fr. Timothy and Brenda Kresky then answered questions taken from the group gathered that evening. **(Audio 00:35:51)**

- What is our approximate timeline of changes? **(Audio 00:37:09)**
  - Starting July 1st, we will reduce the number of worship sites and priests will say only 3 Masses a weekend. This does not necessarily mean that church buildings are closed at this time. In our case, probably no Mass in Ogilvie starting July 1.
  - The thought is to consolidate corporations before selling buildings. Mergers will happen first. Civil mergers are very complicated and will take much longer than the canonical merger process.
  - A transition team will be formed to help with the process at our ACC.
- Families in parishes need help during this transition. **(Audio 00:43:57)**
  - There is a sense of loss, but also possibility.
  - We need to check in on each other. Priests and staff can only do so much. We need to help and be there for each other in this difficult time. Also, check in on your priests.
- Are there statistics and surveys that help explain the reduction in Catholics over the years? **(Audio 00:49:20)**
  - It's a variety of things - smaller families, people moving to larger towns, "spiritual, but not religious" people, the growing number of nonaffiliated people who just don't go to church, bad catechesis.
  - We can't change the past. We should be asking "what will we do now?" It will take at least another generation to see results - we cannot expect instantaneous results.
- Why do we need to close Foreston now? Why not focus our efforts on evangelization, rather than closures? **(Audio 00:52:47)**
  - We need to look at the numbers. Milaca has more population. Looking at buildings. Do we need 2 buildings 4 miles apart?
  - It's not necessarily a result of financial situations. But, Foreston can't afford a priest on its own - it, along with the other churches, are only surviving because of being clustered with other parishes.
  - The ACCs were formed as an effort to keep churches open. Maybe parishes should have closed when the ACCs were formed rather than limping along?
- Why is the Office moving to the Eastern side of the ACC, rather than where the majority of the population is on the Western side? **(Audio 00:56:38)**
  - This is primarily a practical decision because of the space available.
  - One "Administrative Office" doesn't mean that there can't be office space or an office presence in the other location. For ministries like Faith Formation, it would make sense to have them in both locations.

- How will you budget for lost members? **(Audio 00:59:48)**
  - There will very likely be a dip. From looking at other parishes doing this, what we have seen is  $\frac{1}{3}$  stay with the church,  $\frac{1}{3}$  go to another denomination, and  $\frac{1}{3}$  just don't go anywhere.
  - However, we have also seen, from other parishes doing this, that the dip has come back up. Several dioceses are seeing this now - people coming back.
  - Please, come talk to Fr. Timothy if you are struggling and are thinking about not coming back.
  - Fr. Timothy gave the example of funerals. Many people find it difficult to come back to church after the loss of a loved one, like a spouse. However, coming back is often a huge help with healing. Don't walk away and dwell in the pain.
- What will happen with pensions for Staff, especially those who will retire as a result of the changes? **(Audio 01:04:59)**
  - The diocese is working on this.
- Concerns about flooding the market with the churches that will be sold **(Audio 01:05:32)**
  - Brenda is not as concerned about this. It is a concern, but not a huge one. The timeline will be different for every ACC and the market for this will be locally driven.
- The Fellowship Hall in Foreston cannot be found anywhere else in the ACC - what can we do about this? **(Audio 01:08:04)**
  - There is a possibility of building something in the future.
  - Parishes are not closing necessarily because of the state of the buildings. All of the buildings in the ACC are in pretty good condition.
- What will happen with the Adoration Chapel in Foreston? **(Audio 01:10:39)**
  - We likely will move it - it is a very good thing. We don't know the cost of moving it yet, but it will likely be doable. The chapel was constructed in a way so that it could be moved. We don't know yet what it will look like to move it, but we are looking into it.
- Can we bring in missionary priests? **(Audio 01:12:10)**
  - The Bishop is not opposed to bringing missionary priests in, but he wants to vet them first. Cultures can be very different and they would need to be a good fit for our diocese. The most needed right now would be Spanish-speaking priests, as the large Spanish-speaking presence in our diocese is tended to as they need. The Bishop is not actively looking for missionary priests right now, but not opposed to it in the future. It is also very complicated and difficult with visas right now.
- Why are there priests who only serve 1 Parish in our diocese? **(Audio 01:14:47)**
  - There are only 3 parishes where this is the case - Elk River, Christ Our Light (Princeton/Zimmerman), and Morris. Christ Our Light was multiple parishes, now merged into one - we had discussed doing this with our ACC, but it would not work.
  - It is larger due to the numbers. The larger parishes are more work.
- Can you define evangelization and give examples? **(Audio 01:16:14)**
  - Evangelization is to go out, to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to share the news of Jesus Christ in the world. Everyone does this differently. Everything we do can be evangelization.
  - Evangelization is not happening as it should?
  - Some priests come from more traditional backgrounds.
- What can we do to be more welcoming? **(Audio 01:20:15)**
  - Take a look at ourselves. Young people are looking to belong. They are looking for something more - something greater, that the world cannot give.

- Why is there such a large disparity between the numbers in St. Cloud and the Archdiocese? **(Audio 01:22:43)**
  - The Archdiocese went through a large restructuring process back in 2010-2012. They have also had massive changes and a huge drop in number of priests - from 400+ to currently 198 priests. They are continuing to look at closing and mergers even now.
  - The Archdiocese's numbers may look much better than St. Cloud, but their parishes are often much bigger and commonly had multiple priests at one parish.
- Why can't we get more priests from the Archdiocese or other places in the nation? **(Audio 01:25:31)**
  - We have one priest "on loan" from the Archdiocese right now. Sharing priests is not sustainable - everywhere is in need of priests.
  - It's also not just an issue of priests - the number of Catholics is down as well. Even if we had more priests, it doesn't solve all our problems.
- Is there a "Secret Plan" of the Diocesan Planning Office or the Bishop that you wanted all along? **(Audio 01:26:57)**
  - There is no secret plan. Brenda has been working on this for 8 years. She knew that some closures would have to happen (just looking at the numbers), but not necessarily which churches would have to close.
  - Many plans that were submitted were different from what she anticipated, and this is a good thing. The Bishop is counting on ACCs to come up with solutions.
  - Some requirements do need to be met (such as 3 Masses a weekend per priest), but it's not pre-determined what exactly will change to make this happen.
- What will happen to our cemeteries? **(Audio 01:31:29)**
  - Nothing probably will change. None of the cemeteries are connected to the church properties, they're all separate. You cannot sell cemeteries. They likely will continue as they have been - people will still be buried there.
- What about historic churches in the diocese? Will some be turned into oratories? **(Audio 01:32:49)**
  - We do not know yet what will happen. Some might be church buildings that are used occasionally. Not all church buildings that will be closed will be sold or demolished. Brenda doesn't know which ones.
  - Churches do have to be maintained. Fr. Timothy gave the example of the church in Gilman, which just had some expensive maintenance done. It was very expensive, but necessary to keep it in good condition.
- What ACCs around us have plans that are finalized? **(Audio 01:35:30)**
  - No plans are technically finalized yet, but plans that have been submitted and affirmed by CAP are: Harding and Lastrup will close from the Pierz ACC and Braham will close from the Isanti Area ACC. Other surrounding ACCs we don't know yet, like Foley and Onamia.
- Will there be dates made public for when churches will close? **(Audio 01:37:11)**
  - Once all the plans are in and finalized, Brenda will send out a letter to all households in the diocese with the Diocese's plan. Merger decrees will come in the spring. People will not be surprised with the plans.
  - How will we know which churches are closing? It may be in the Central Minnesota Catholic Magazine, they will be made public in some way. There may be special liturgies or gatherings advertised for closings.
- Will the Transition Team consist of members from all 4 parishes? **(Audio 01:40:18)**
  - The original [diocesan] plan had been for the All Things New committees to be this transition team as well. But, Brenda has seen that many are tired or burned

out from the process this year. So, the transition teams for the ACCs will likely include some people from that original committee, but also from all the communities affected by the transitions.

- Fr. Timothy's intention is to have a new committee, made up of members from all 4 churches, probably much larger in number, and more staff involved. If you are interested in being on this Transition Team, please email him to let him know.
- How else can we get the Church to make some changes? **(Audio 01:43:18)**
  - You can write letters to the Bishop or to the USCCB (of which Bishop Patrick is part of). You can also write to the Pope, though he may not personally see it.
- Couldn't closing churches make our current situation worse? **(Audio 01:45:37)**
  - Looking back in history, the period of biggest growth was when parishes were smaller.
  - There probably will be a dip in attendance.
  - Some people are saying that all the money we poured into these churches was a waste. This is a sad mentality - think of all the good that was done.
  - Keeping all the churches open makes it so that the people are the ones who don't have to sacrifice as much. The priests are stretched too thin, the people need to step up to make the sacrifices. Some have already given a lot to their parishes - others need to step up. We can be adverse to sacrifice.
  - The Diocese is paying attention to what people are saying. The clergy are stressed, overworked, and overburdened. Something needed to happen.
  - We continue to ask, "what is God's will in this?" It is not our church, but God's church.