

## **Bridge-Builders for a Thriving Mission: Co-Responsibility in the Changing Context of Congregational Life and Ministry**

Saint John’s School of Theology and Seminary (SOT/Sem) is located in the Diocese of St. Cloud in central Minnesota. We have long been partners with the Diocese and over the past three years have assisted diocesan leaders in a pastoral planning process that has been changing the lives of all parishioners and pastoral leaders. In 2019, Bishop Donald Kettler announced a plan to restructure the diocese into 29 Area Catholic Communities (ACCs) to provide for the pastoral and spiritual needs of its 123,475 baptized members. Bishop Kettler wrote:

*I initiated this pastoral planning process for several reasons. The landscape of our diocese is changing. The overall Catholic population of our 16-county diocese has been declining over the last 30 years, and it also has been shifting. Our rural, western counties are shrinking in population, while our eastern counties, closer to the Twin Cities, are growing. We have a growing number of Latino Catholics, many of whom need spiritual and pastoral care in Spanish<sup>1</sup>... We also have fewer priests than we once did. We project that in about a decade, we will have fewer than 60 priests under age 70 to serve our current 131 parishes.*

*This pastoral planning challenge, in fact, presents us with opportunities to revitalize our faith, make our parishes more vibrant, and strengthen the Church for its mission for many, many years to come.... I didn’t initiate this pastoral planning process simply because we have fewer priests. All of the changes I noted above require us to think about “being Church” in a new way — one in which we rethink our traditional territorial parish structure so that we can be more effective in forming and sustaining disciples given these new realities....*

*As part of an ACC, however, parishes will be called to new levels of collaboration and resource-sharing. Pastors will work closely with lay staff, deacons, volunteers and all the baptized from the ACC’s parishes to meet the area’s spiritual and pastoral needs. Every person serving in a leadership position will need strong, ongoing formation appropriate to her or his role. Every person in our diocese — from pastors to every person in the pews — has a part in helping to build strong faith communities that nurture discipleship.<sup>2</sup>*

The ACCs replace a previous strategy the Diocese used to face similar problems which included either yoked or clustered parishes. This approach allowed the Diocese to keep parishes open but

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<sup>1</sup> In Minnesota, the Caucasian population grew at 1% between 2010 and 2015 while the Hispanic population increased by 10%. The rates are not only an urban phenomenon: In 2017, the Caucasian population grew in 28 of 87 Minnesota counties, but in all but four counties the number of people of color increased.

<sup>2</sup> Donald J. Kettler, “Letter from Bishop Kettler Regarding Area Catholic Communities,” <http://planning.stcldio.org/area-catholic-community/letter-from-bishop-kettler-regarding-area-catholic-communities/> (accessed May 26, 2020).

asked little of them beyond sharing a priest and coordinating mass schedules. In the ACC model, parishes will plan, schedule, oversee ministries, provide staff, share resources, and steward facilities across all the parishes in the community. The model demands a new level of collaboration and cooperation across parishes for the good of the whole ACC.

Each ACC formed a planning team in 2019 and were to finalize their first strategic plan when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, which has slowed the process. Nevertheless, the Diocese continues to work with ACCs to launch their first planning initiatives. The Endowment's Thriving Congregations Initiative was announced at an opportune time—the support would allow the SOT/Sem to work directly with the Diocese to form, train, and resource leaders, both pastoral and lay, as they seek to revitalize the church in this new structure, which calls for co-responsibility by all the people.

As this exciting opportunity emerges, we recognize that significant challenges within the Catholic Church have discouraged our people, and one more change can add to their sense of loss. Three significant challenges that face the ACCs are the demise of the traditional territorial parish, the clergy sexual abuse crisis, and the changing face of the Catholic community. To move ahead parishes will need to face these issues and embrace a process of healing, truth-seeking, and bridge building for the good of the whole church.

First, parishioners are haunted by the question, “What happened to the neighborhood or town parish?” Over the past 30 years parishioners in linked parishes believed they shared two things: a pastor and a common faith. For the ACCs to be successful, each must establish a planning council, collaborate in their ministries, and discern their mission in their local community.

Second, the clergy sexual abuse crisis has rendered profound mistrust and disengagement by ministers and laity. Besides spiritual woundedness, this tragedy cost the U.S. Catholic Church \$3 billion dollars. About one-fourth of U.S. Catholics have decreased donations to the church and fewer than four in ten Catholics attend church in any given week.<sup>3</sup> The tragedy has taken a toll on ministerial leadership as well. Dr. Barbara Sutton's recent research on burnout indicates that 40% of pastoral leaders in this area feel engaged in their ministerial work. The ACCs will need to foster an atmosphere of healing, transparency, and ongoing formation of all ministers so that the people can trust in their leaders and cooperate in this new model of church.

Third, parishes will need to shift from assimilating new members into its culture to fostering intercultural communities. At one time Stearns County, located in the Diocese, was home to the largest percentage of German Catholics in the country; that is changing with the arrival of Hispanic Catholics, many of whom are immigrants from Mexico and are drawn to work in the poultry industry. Parishes have not only lost their German heritage but are now called to welcome people from cultures very different from their Euro-American culture. The ACCs are

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<sup>3</sup> Lydia Saad, “Catholics' Church Attendance Resumes Downward Slide,” Gallup, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/232226/church-attendance-among-catholics-resumes-downward-slide.aspx>, (accessed May 26, 2020).

the next step in creating intercultural parishes where the whole community learns what Pope Francis encourages: to build bridges to move towards *the other*—be they immigrants, Muslims, the poor, and the marginalized. All Christians need to learn how to do this with graciousness, humility, a sense of compromise, mutual respect, and dialogue.

Both the SOT/Sem and the Diocese of Saint Cloud have been strengthening our intercultural resources. Recently, 60 Hispanic lay people enrolled in the SOT/Sem’s Emmaus Institute for lay leadership, taught by Spanish-speaking faculty who are predominantly alumni/ae. The SOT Board of Regents, faculty, and staff have increased their intercultural competencies through workshops in 2019-20 with Dr. Hosffman Ospino, Boston College, Dr. Arturo Chavez, Mexican American Catholic College, and by completing the *Intercultural Development Indicator (IDI)*.

Grappling with the loss of the neighborhood parish, the spiritual and economic fallout from clergy sexual abuse, the disengagement of pastoral leaders, and the changing cultural dynamics in rural communities, it would be easy for the ACCs to have a sense of scarcity in the face of such bold challenges and opportunities. Churches often respond to crises by reducing spending, cutting staff, and shrinking outreach and care for their facilities.<sup>4</sup> But cutting budgets often illustrates our lack of trust in God and the human resources God has provided to the church. Thriving, in our instance, is about cultivating a spirit of co-responsibility within the whole church—clergy, lay ecclesial ministers, lay leaders, parishioners, and diocesan leaders—who together can strive to grow through change.

### **Characteristics of Thriving Congregations**

In 2007, Minnesotans learned firsthand the importance of the physical structure of bridges when the Interstate 35W bridge over the Mississippi River in downtown Minneapolis collapsed. Despite ongoing repair work, the bridge had been classified as “fracture critical.” The structural deficit meant that the failure of just *one vital component could cause the whole bridge to collapse*. As a durable bridge requires sound components, the ACCs can build solid bridges on a foundation that will last over time and not collapse from fractures in its foundation. The three bridges that must be constructed are: (1) within the ACC, between the parishes; (2) intercultural competencies, particularly between members of the dominant culture and Hispanic members; and (3) between ACCs and their local community.

Thriving ACCs will have the following characteristics:

*Pastoral leaders understand their role as bridge builders.* Bishop Donald Kettler set a standard for thriving ACCs he wrote: “Everyone has a role in this venture.... Every person in our diocese—from pastors to every person in the pews—has a part in helping to build strong faith

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<sup>4</sup> “The Economy’s Impact on Churches (Part 2 of 3): How Churches Have Adapted,” Barna, January 25, 2010, <https://www.barna.com/research/the-economys-impact-on-churches-part-2-of-3-how-churches-have-adapted/>, accessed May 26, 2020.

communities that nurture discipleship.”<sup>5</sup> Each ACC will have up to two pastors and they will have oversight of a team of ministers—deacons and lay ecclesial ministers—and who together will provide liturgical, catechetical, care, and justice ministries, and the ministry team’s vitality is a primary component to the three bridges they must build.

*Bridge-builders start with relationships.* Timothy Keller and John Inazu, coauthors of *Uncommon Ground*, point out that building bridges is structural but also relational: “Building relational bridges is much like physical ones; it requires innovation, investment, and an eye toward structures that will withstand the test of time.... there are four qualities essential to relational building: respect, humility, trustworthiness, and love.”<sup>6</sup> In order to build new relationships across the parishes, ministers will need to meet with people and listen to their stories, which demands a high degree of emotional and pastoral intelligence. In addition, pastoral leaders must help guide the people in becoming *gente-puente*, “a bridge-building people” ministering to Catholics of all cultural backgrounds.

*Pastoral planning is rooted in prayer and discernment as well as accurate information* in order that decisions are fair, transparent, and grounded in the church’s mission. ACCs need to learn both practices of discernment as well as how to use sociological tools that help them describe their situation and identify opportunities and challenges.

*Discernment includes taking risks and learning together.* A culture for thriving includes permission to experiment, try new ideas, and adjust and adapt. The ACCs will need to foster mutual learning where people seek to understand different perspectives, learn from what does not work, and generate new understandings.

*Gifts are called forth.* Thriving ACCs will develop capacities to help parishioners discern a sense of calling and identify their gifts for service in their daily lives, parish, community and the ACC. Leadership development in the ACCs will be critical, both in terms of ongoing formation for ministry staffs (paid and unpaid) as well as identifying new leaders, especially those from the margins.

*Mission has its source in liturgical worship and aims toward the flourishing of life in community.* As the Second Vatican Council notes, the Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life.” The liturgy draws us together as one Body in Christ and nourishes us for service in the world. An essential component of the ACC model is to provide parishioners Sunday celebration of the Eucharist within 30 miles, and for priests to celebrate no more than three times a Sunday. This commitment points to belief that the Eucharist, with all the sacraments, are the source of our

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<sup>5</sup> Donald J. Kettler, “Letter.”

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Keller & John Inazu, *Uncommon Ground: Living Faithfully in a World of Difference*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2020), 132-133.

thriving together. ACCs need to build their capacity to welcome a variety of cultural expressions regarding music, traditions, and celebrations of non-English speaking groups.

*Christian practices rooted in the Benedictine tradition* can provide a sense of stability and common purpose for the ACCs during this time of transition. We will focus on five practices:

- *Conversatio groups* comprised of 8-12 people, committed to a common way of life, will meet monthly to support each other in living out the Gospel.
- *Lectio divina and visio divina* foster listening to God’s Word “with the ear of the heart,” as Saint Benedict said.
- *Discernment of charisms and gifts* provides people ways to discover how to serve and share in the co-responsibility of the community.
- *Radical hospitality* is expressed in The Rule of Saint Benedict as welcoming all as Christ. For the ACCs, hospitality is a necessary practice for building bridges across the parishes, with new neighbors, and with those in need in the larger community. It will mean sharing resources, facilities, and being patient in the slow process of change.
- *Conversatio morum* is Saint Benedict’s reminder that conversion is the lifelong path of discipleship and is never completed once and for all. ACCs will require the practices of humility, forgiveness, and charity as they make their way forward.

### **Program Purposes and Goals**

The purpose of *Bridge-Builders for a Thriving Mission* is to foster in each ACC a sense of co-responsibility for the Gospel’s mission that is shared among all the baptized and pastoral leaders—priests, deacons, and lay ecclesial ministers.<sup>7</sup> Our goals are to:

1. Form Thriving Learning Communities (TLC) in each ACC that will build strong relationships, discern new structures and process, discover ways to welcome all Catholic people, and form community partnerships for service.
2. Create Thriving Resource Teams (TRT) to guide and coach ACCs and parish teams as they form learning communities.
3. Provide ongoing formation in pastoral leadership and invite people to discern their callings to parish leadership, with attention to Hispanic leaders.
4. Offer resources and thriving learning community opportunities to ministry groups across the Diocese to explore innovative ideas (e.g., parish business managers, directors of faith formation, deacons, parish secretaries).
5. Provide formation in five Benedictine practices that can form communities of disciples who can discern wisely how to live the Gospel in this place and time.

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<sup>7</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Message on the Occasion of the Sixth Ordinary Assembly of the International Forum of Catholic Action,” August 10, 2012.

The program's structure is built upon ACCs forming teams of up to eight people who will be invited to the SOT/Sem for training to become a Thriving Learning community; over five years, all twenty-nine ACCs will participate in the program. Each ACC will be assigned a Thriving Resource Team, comprised of two experts, who will help the ACC implement their work.

*Bridge-Building for a Thriving Mission* has three central strategies:

- 1) **Thriving Learning Communities Formation Program.** Twice a year teams of up to eight people from three ACCs will gather for five days at Saint John's SOT/Sem. The gathering will focus on guiding each ACC to discern their mission given their new structure and circumstances. The three ACC teams will study and investigate their local community, learn more about immigrants and citizens from other cultures in the area, and identify ways to serve their local communities. From this learning, the ACC will identify a project to address a situation and have an opportunity to apply for up to \$2,000 to fund the project. Through this process the parishes in each ACC will begin acquiring the skills of collaborating, learning, listening, negotiating, and deciding on a ministry they can address together. The gathering will also allow for collaboration across the three ACC teams and at the end of the year, the groups will gather again to share and reflect on the outcomes of their funded projects.
- 2) **Thriving Resource Teams Formation Program.** Each ACC will be assigned a *Thriving Resource Team* to accompany them over the course of their project. The purpose of the TRTs is to provide each ACC with two experts who can help them form their TLC, develop skills in facilitating organizational change, and incorporate the five practices listed above in their ministries. Each TRT will be composed of diocesan leaders, parish leaders, and parishioners and will help align the Diocese's mission and ministries and the ACCs.

Each year 12 individuals will be identified, recruited and invited to attend a five-day training, which includes (a) the vision and key elements of a thriving learning community, (b) a theology of ecclesial co-responsibility, (c) skill building for interpersonal communication, intercultural competency, conflict management, and systems theory, and (d) approaches to coaching TLCs. At the end of the fifth year, there will be 60 people trained to serve on TRTs.

TRT members will be prepared to interpret the TLCs work and document their learning through field notes. Each quarter the TRT will gather for a "field day" to identify and analyze their insights about thriving learning communities and evaluate their work. As TRT members increase each year, all will continue to meet, thereby gaining greater insight into the processes that make for strong ACCs and other models of thriving learning communities that may emerge.

- 3) **Program and resource development by the SOT/Sem.** The grantee-SOT/SEM will (a) assist each ACC in forming a leadership team, (b) develop effective training programs for

both TLCs and TRTs, (c) develop resources and tools for cultivating Christian practices, (d) create a process for TRTs to accompany the TLCs, (e) convene a team of SOT/Sem and diocesan leaders to oversee the project’s vision, and (f) evaluate the program and oversee the funding process.

The SOT/Sem will use existing resources it has developed for this program—*lectio* and *visio divina* resources using *The Saint John’s Bible*, Intercultural Development Indicator assessment tools, and a study guide and self-assessment tool for the ACCs written by Dr. Barbara Sutton, *Where Two or Three are Gathered*. The project will also develop a toolbox for Christian practices and a website for the project. We will utilize several resources from other organizations including the Sienna Institute’s Called and Gifted Self Study and Interview training and their Workbook and Inventory; the Gallup StrengthsFinder training; and Digital Demographic Data Research Tools.

### Congregational Learning Process

We have designed a learning process for both the TLCs and TRTs based on the experiential learning model developed by David A. Kolb.<sup>8</sup> The learning cycle is composed of four elements: experience, observation and reflection, developing ideas, and testing ideas.

Learning Cycle	TLCs	TRTs
Experience	Prior to formation, conduct interviews in two-person teams with parish and community leaders to explore trends, challenges, unmet needs, and how parishes might be of service to persons and groups.	At their formation training, participants will meet community leaders who have experience building bridges across communities.
Observe and reflect	At the training, gather the insights from the interviews and discern questions, patterns, and invite interpretation. Share the pastoral plans the ACCs formed in 2019 and make adjustments.	Observe the TLCs as they reflect on the data they have gathered and their proposed responses. Gather learnings from TLC gatherings. Train TRT members to utilize field notes for observations and relevant data.
Develop ideas	Each ACC discerns one community issue they can work on together across the parishes and designs a project	The TRT engages insights from systems theory, change theory, gap analysis, intercultural research, leadership styles, and emotional intelligence to help guide their work with the ACCs.

<sup>8</sup> David A. Kolbe, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source and Development of Learning*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1984).

Test ideas	ACCs implement their projects and evaluate the outcomes.	The TRT members test and evaluate their approaches with the TLCs and how to improve them for the next round of ACCs. TRTs evaluate the viability of field notes as a learning process and adjust.
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Both the SOT/Sem and the Diocese will gain considerably from what each can learn from this initiative. For instance, the SOT/Sem faculty, who will participate in the field-days with the TRTs, will gain insights that can shape our curriculum, and the Diocese can learn first-hand what elements are needed for the ACCs to be viable thriving communities.

**Outcomes and Evaluations**

<i>Short-term Outcomes</i>	<i>Evaluation</i>
1. TRTs accompany the TLCs with competence in building relational and systemic bridges.	Identify aspects of the formation program that strengthened the TRTs ability to accompany TLCs and propose changes for the next group. Review field-days and field notes to capture responses and analyze for important insights and patterns.
2. Provide a digital demographic tool to assess the demographics of the ACCs and the discern the pastoral priorities of the community.	Analyze the capacity of each ACC to use demographic information to discern their pastoral priorities. Assess how well the TRTs did in guiding this process
<i>Intermediate Outcomes</i>	<i>Evaluation</i>
3. Ability of parishioners (up to 500 who will have received the training) to name their charisms, gifts, and strengths and connect them to their community.	Assess the degree to which participants in the TLCs and their parishes can identify 3-5 gifts and how they are lived out in the ACC, the diocese, and daily life.
4. Christian practices lead ACCs to a vital, active faith.	Before gatherings invite participants to reflect on: What Christian practices do you think would aid your ACC toward a sense of thriving and co-responsibility? In what ways would they foster the ACC? Six weeks after the training invite participants to reflect on: What practices have you implemented and what kinds of impact do you see at this early point? In what ways does your ACC encourage your faith to be active? How do Christian practices shape your



	pastoral care, communal worship, and outreach to the poor and marginalized?
5. Ideas and innovations emerge that advance a thriving mission.	Each ACC will respond to these questions at the completion of their work: What helped your project come to fruition? What were the bottlenecks in implementing the idea? If you had to revamp this project, what would be different? What has the TLC learned? Who else needs to know about this idea or innovation? Information is used to design the next formation training event and the work of TRTs.
<i>Long-term Outcomes</i>	<i>Evaluation</i>
6. Acquire awareness of one's cultural perspective through the Intercultural Development Indicator (IDI).	Gather insights and stories from 200 who have taken the IDI, and from TRT field notes. Retrieve stories of how people and their communities build bridges within the ACC, others cultural groups, and to the wider community.
7. Build bridges between and among parishes in each ACC as they create communities of strength and vision.	Draw from the field notes key indicators of vitality by observing how Christian practices consistently appear across the ACCs, noting how the frequency and quality of Christian practices shape ACC culture, identity, and vocation, and gather personal testimonies and communal stories of change in the ACCs.
8. Transform the Diocese through strategic conversations based on learning that emerges from this project.	Use Causal Mapping, a tool that enables organizations to make sense of challenging situations, to provide a way forward for wise pastoral planning and mission development. This tool will also assist the TRTs in developing action-oriented strategy maps and logical models for pastoral decision making, that includes an explanation of outcomes and choices among alternative actions. <sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> John M. Bryson et al., *Visible Thinking* (England: Wiley & Sons, 2004).

## **Leadership**

Dr. Barbara Sutton, Director of Ministerial Formation and Field Education, at the SOT/Sem Diocesan will direct the program. She has served for 12 years on our faculty and administrative staff, designed the curriculum for the *Saint John's Bible*, and serves the Diocese of Saint Cloud in a variety of roles: consultant to the Planning Office; member of the committee on restructuring parishes into ACCs; member of the Deacon Advisory Committee; consultant and instructor for the Emmaus Institute; and previously member of the Diocesan Liturgical Committee. She has also directed two Endowment grants: *Conversatio: Lifelong Learning Program* and the Economic Challenges Facing Future Church Ministers.

## **Communication Plan**

Our project will be communicated by the partners in a variety of ways:

- The Diocesan Regional Ministry Gathering will showcase the ACCs process and learning (annual)
- The Diocesan Ministry Day will invite innovative TLCs to lead workshops (biennial)
- The SOT/Sem will host a conference, *Bridge-Builders for a Thriving Mission: A Festival of Learning*, that will model radical hospitality and intercultural practice with bilingual speakers and interpreters.
- Tim Welch, associate director, Diocesan Catholic Education Ministries Office, will oversee the creation of three-minute recordings, *Thriving Moments*, by our participants, which will be shared on the partners' websites and through social media. The vignettes will include promising practices, stories of inspired action, and discussion and interpretation of research data that cultivates thinking about how communities thrive.
- Each partner's stakeholders will be informed about the project at their annual meetings, which includes the SOT/Sem Board of Regents and faculty, the Diocesan Planning Advisory Committee, and Saint John's Abbey.
- Stories and events will also be disseminated through each partner's print and social media outlets.
- The SOT/Sem will develop a teaching tool for theological educators, entitled *Case Studies for Fostering Thriving Mission and Co-responsibility in a Changing Congregational Context*. The book will provide case studies, written by selected faculty, leaders, and participants, that examine the ways in which parishes form learning communities, the impact they have on a parish and diocesan system, and how the theology and practice of co-responsibility develops in parishes.

## **Partnerships**

Saint John's University SOT/Sem will partner with the Diocese of Saint Cloud to nurture the mission of the newly formed ACCs and with Saint John's Abbey Center for Latino Ministry, Casa San Benito, to strengthen the parishes intercultural competencies. As a Roman Catholic and

Benedictine institution, our mission is to prepare men and women for ecclesial ministry, ordained and lay, in the church and we have a long history of preparing pastoral leadership for the central Minnesota region. For the Diocese of Saint Cloud, we educated priests until the mid-1990s, and today educate the deacons and lay ecclesial ministers who serve in parishes, schools, hospitals, and diocesan offices. Faculty members serve on diocesan advisory committees and contribute to parish ministry formation and mission development programs. The partners are eager to build bridges with local faith communities and foster a culture of co-responsibility.

The three partners will meet quarterly to oversee the project's implementation and evaluation and be represented by the following individuals

1. SOT/Sem: Fr. Dale Launderville, OSB, Dean, and Dr. Barbara Sutton
2. Diocese of Saint Cloud: Mayuli Bales, Director of Multicultural Ministry; Kristi Bivens, Associate Director of Lay Leadership; Brenda Kresky, Director of Pastoral Planning; and Tim Welch, Associate Director of Educational Media and Technology. Several diocesan directors with direct oversight of the ACCs will serve as trainers for the TRTs.
3. Fr. Efrain Rosado, OSB, Director of Casa San Benito, serves as Director of Formation for the Spanish-speaking students in the Emmaus Institute. He is a trained administrator for the Intercultural Development Indicator and works with SOT students and faculty on their competencies. Fr. Rosado has also served in Latino ministry in both Benedictine and diocesan parishes. He will also be a trainer for the TRT.

In addition to Saint John's University, the SOT/Sem works in relationship with Saint John's Abbey, the College of Saint Benedict, and Saint Benedict's Monastery in Saint Joseph, Minnesota—who together have modeled bridge-building for the past 150 years. Both the monasteries and schools have required innovative leadership in the face of ecclesial and cultural change, as our leadership in the liturgical movement, beginning in the 1920s, gives witness. Saint John's Abbey is home to other important institutional bridge-builders including, the Colledgeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research, the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, *The Saint John's Bible*, the Episcopal House of Prayer, and the Liturgical Press.

Additional consultants include Dr. Arturo Chavez, President, Mexican American Catholic College in San Antonio, Texas, who will be a resource to our TLCs and TRTs, and Dr. Victor Klimoski, former director of the SOT/Sem's *Conversatio: Lifelong Learning Program*, and now an independent consultant.

### **Anticipated Obstacles in Implementing the Program**

The primary challenge at this point is the availability of gathering space on our campus during the next year due to the pandemic. At this point, Saint John's Abbey Guesthouse is closed until June 1, 2021 and other entities on our campuses are also closed for the short-term. The Diocese of Saint Cloud is presently making plans for a slow reopening. Saint John's University plans to reopen gradually to the public in July and is aiming to have students back on campus this fall.

Our hope is to offer in-person meetings by late 2021, which will allow time for planning and start-up. If we cannot host our first meetings on campus, our plan would be to offer online meetings and training. We are aware that not everyone has access to computer technology and the internet, especially among Spanish-speaking parishioners and leaders. If computer access is needed by participants, we would shift funds from the onsite meeting and overnight accommodations to providing technology support to parishes for their participation in online meetings.

### **Sustainability and Continuation**

Our project has an important multiplier effect over the five years with an increasing number of people to be prepared as TRT members who are working to align the mission and vision of the Diocese of Saint Cloud with the TLCs. This multiplier effect will empower bridge-builders and increase co-responsibility at the parish and diocesan level.

Saint John's SOT/Sem will make the following commitments to sustain this effort after 2025:

1. Serve in a consultative role to the Diocese of Saint Cloud in the areas of thriving ministry, pastoral planning, pastoral leadership development, and evaluation.
2. Identify and implement ways to continue gathering the ACCs experience to garner further implications for their pastoral life and ministry.
3. Provide regular SOT/Sem course offerings on intercultural competencies and actively expand recruitment of people from marginalized communities.
4. Maintain a website with resources on Christian practices in the Benedictine tradition
5. Integrate the initiative's learnings into our curriculum for established courses such as Parish Administration and Ministerial Formation for Christian Leaders.
6. Commit the Victor Klimoski Endowment for Lifelong Learning to support the ongoing work of fostering thriving congregations in central Minnesota and raise additional funds for this fund.

The Diocese of Saint Cloud enthusiastically commits to further the development of the Festival of Learning within its Regional Ministry Gatherings and the Diocesan Ministry Day.

Saint John's Abbey Center for Latino Ministry commits to accompanying and forming Emmaus Institute students and SOT/Sem students in the development of their intercultural competencies and providing contextual experiences for students.