Bishop Steve Newsletter 9.30.26

As I write this, I'm returning from a consequential House of Bishops meeting. The bishops met deeply aware of and concerned about the chaos that characterizes contemporary life. Our work was focused on the ways that we might provide helpful leadership and hope for our distressed parishes and dioceses.

We spent a couple of days considering the trends and events that might disrupt the plans we currently have for congregational revitalization. The House has entered into an agreement with the Institute for the Future (IFTF) to develop a map of the next ten years, outlining trends and seeking insight into possible disruptive events. Predicting the future is impossible, but developing clarity about our mission and how it intersects with other developments is crucial.

The IFTF calls our current reality BANI: brittle, anxious, nonlinear and incomprehensible. That is, the current structure of reality is brittle – things break unexpectedly; anxious – all decisions are surrounded by heightened anxiety; nonlinear – actions and consequences do not always line up; and, incomprehensible – things often happen that make little sense to the people who are experiencing them. People often end up asking, "How did we get here? Why is this happening?" And the response is often anger, even rage.

In the face of this BANI reality, the church is invited to lead with a counter-acting BANI: bendable – flexible, adaptable; attentive – paying attention to what's happening, and especially to people; neuroflexible – a willingness pivot, to improvise; and, interconnected – staying in touch with one another across our varying perspectives and differences.

Theologically, we are called to recognize that all of us are made in God's image and redeemed by Christ. Our future is together, and we need to work together across our differences. We face many dilemmas – problems for which no solution is apparent – but it is not acceptable simply to sit back and watch things come apart. We need to act – with kindness, compassion and justice – even if clarity is hard to come by, and we may make mistakes.

We left the meeting feeling sobered, but also encouraged. There is much more to say about what we learned, and I'll try to share it with all of you in the weeks ahead.

It was a privilege to represent you at this meeting, and I look forward to seeing you soon.

Blessings,
Bishop Steve