Whenever I call Catholic Mutual to ask if something’s okay, I get an immediate response and the answer is almost always a yes,” says Jennifer Hood, assistant finance officer of the Diocese of Salina. “It's a really unique partnership that we have: really more like a friendship. We appreciate them and we feel appreciated by them.”

There’s another reason why these visits are essential. As a mission diocese, about half of the parishes don’t have a resident pastor so the inspections often head trouble off before it begins.

“The smaller parishes, where there’s no one there full-time, really appreciate this,” says Doug Weller, editor of The Register, the newspaper of the Diocese of Salina. “The diocese makes every effort to keep parishes open as long as it’s feasible to support them but when no one is there to keep an eye on things, there’s a potential for disaster. It can be a real challenge for them.”

Another challenge is the high risk of storms on the plains. Weller recalls a 2008 tornado that ripped through the town of Chapman, leveling a little stone church that was home to the very first parish in the diocese. Catholic Mutual was able to help in the restoration of the adjacent cemetery, but sadly, the original church could not be saved. Today, a memorial with stones from the building sits on the site.

It serves as a poetic reminder of the way the Diocese of Salina honors its legacy while moving toward the future. When they were created in 1887 (just two years before helping to form Catholic Mutual), they were served by circuit priests who made their rounds on horseback,
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serving the Catholics in each town once every three months or so. Later, came the Irish missionary priests who served through the 1960s.

Today, according to Weller, about one-fourth of all the active priests in the diocese are international, mostly from India. “People are embracing them with a passion,” he says.

As we have learned over the years, those who are embraced by the Diocese of Salina have a friend forever.