

Results of the Holy Trinity Parish Synod on Synodality Listening Process

Introduction

In 2023, the Vatican will hold the Synod on Synodality. In preparation, dioceses around the world are gathering input and feedback to send forward and share as a part of crucial preparation. Here in the Archdiocese of Washington, each parish was asked to submit feedback from its own listening session.

The Holy Trinity Parish Pastoral Council took on the effort of coordinating our own listening process at Trinity. Unsurprisingly, several listening sessions were required as many of our parishioners wanted to share their voices. After eight formal listening sessions, including one focused on the LGBTQIA+ population and another for the young adult community, a survey, and additional feedback received from various sources, more than 300 individual voices were heard. It was a prayerful, uplifting, and thought-provoking process that led to insightful feedback.

Throughout this document you will find summaries of the survey responses categorized into five themes. They are:

1. Spirituality is strong at Holy Trinity
2. The church and fellow Catholics should give vocal support for LGBTQIA+ Catholics
3. Women should have a greater role in the Church
4. Young Catholics are unlikely to return to the Church until it makes fundamental changes
5. The Church is the people, not just the hierarchy

You will also find a section dedicated to our formal response to the Archdiocese, which was a shorter summation of the full report due to the format required.

Finally, there is a section on feedback for the parish that arose during the listening sessions. This feedback has been brought to the Parish Council and is being reviewed and passed to the appropriate committee or staff member for potential action. Updates will continue in the coming months to ensure everyone is aware of how we are moving forward with your feedback.

Thank you to everyone who made these sessions possible. Thank you to the Parish Council for all their work and dedication in making these sessions possible. Thank you to Fr. Kevin for his support and encouragement so that all feedback could be taken seriously. Thank you to the Restorative Justice leaders for running our listening sessions to ensure everyone could be heard. And, of course, thank you to each person who participated, forwarded the survey, spread the word, and shared their thoughts. This process was inspiring and encouraging because of the overwhelmingly enthusiastic response we received.

Tania Chomiak-Salvi, President and Jennifer Dorsey, Vice President
On behalf of the Parish Pastoral Council

Theme 1: Spirituality is strong at Holy Trinity

This theme reflects the strengths of Holy Trinity Parish. Holy Trinity is community and spirituality oriented and multiple aspects – from retreats, to a focus on Ignatian spirituality, are highlighted. There are also noted areas for improvement for Holy Trinity in this area, including the suggestion for more roles for the lay on the altar to ensuring we are inviting those we serve to be with us in community.

Below are a selection of the quotes and paraphrased statements from our sessions and surveys. There were many cases of repeat statements across groups and sessions, therefore some repetition has been omitted for length and clarity.

Overall Holy Trinity Impact

- I don't know if I would still be Catholic if not for Holy Trinity.
- I am a Catholic at Holy Trinity, but I'm not a Catholic of the Archdiocese or the global Church. I stay focused on my parish.
- The LGBTQIA+ Ministry and Divorced and Separated Ministry were highlighted as important.
- Very appreciative of what Holy Trinity does, what the liturgies do for us spiritually, and what the homilies do for us spiritually and intellectually.
- Very appreciative to have found a faith community to give the strength to do what Jesus calls them to do in the faith community.
- Parish is trying to be more inclusive, but its current membership makes it challenging to do that kind of work in a convincing way.
- Prayer and giving up my troubles to God brings me comfort and prayer. I wish the Church would encourage more unstructured prayer, not just the rote prayers.
- Getting into the scripture has been very helpful for me. I wish the Church would encourage more reading of and praying with scripture.
- Obstacle: parish seems to be aligned along political and social justice issues. Everyone should be welcome.

Pandemic Impact

- Obstacle: pandemic - much is lost when we are not worshiping together in person.
- Zoom makes it so much easier for me to participate--and to engage in a greater way.
- Zoom services during the pandemic were very life-giving. I value experiences like that-- and this gathering--and they are a highlight of being at Holy Trinity

Ignatian Spirituality

- Ignatian Spirituality is a rare and wonderful gift of our parish. Not common in all parishes.
- Retreats.
- Spiritual Exercises are offered to laypeople. This is an astonishing gift.
- Ignatian spirituality is strong.

- Ignatian Spirituality is primary at our parish, and it helps us move deeper into a relationship with God than rote participation in Catholic mass would.
- Ignatian spirituality engages me in a thoughtful, cerebral way.
- The Jesuit nature of Holy Trinity is a breath of fresh air. The Jesuits are courageous, intellectual, willing to act, and take risks. How can this radiate beyond our parish and help recenter the Church?
- Ignatian Spirituality and how community uses it in discerning makes Holy Trinity special.
- Retreats and spiritual direction have been comforting and welcoming, even for a non-Catholic.

Supporting and Community with the People We Serve

- Obstacle: I don't see us inviting those we serve to come worship with us.
- We are more oriented toward direct service to help the marginalized instead of prioritizing their stories.
- Parish has lots of activities for when people come to Holy Trinity. What do we do to go out and reach people? How do we use lay people to say: "we want to meet you where you are"?

Importance of and Experience with the Mass

- Obstacle: our parish has not educated us enough about the importance of the ministry of the assembly. Our celebration of Mass can be rote. The assembly should be the primary choir, for example.
- We need more space for laypeople at the altar, even when multiple clergy members are concelebrating Mass.
- Mass is a communal experience. The behavioral aspects are powerful.
- Holy Trinity has been very inviting and inclusive. I cannot say that about the Church as a whole.
- I don't always feel engaged in the mass. I can say all the lines because I memorized them in Catholic school, and I believe them, but I don't feel an emotional connection to it. I wish there were more freedom in the Church--a little flexibility--to connect with the emotion in the mass on a personal level.
- The ritual and routine of the mass are part of what I like about the Catholic Church. I can go to any church in the world, and we are praying the same prayers and reading the same gospels. It makes me feel as though I am a part of something larger--a part of God's kingdom.
- The celebration of the mass--especially daily mass--helps align my actions and my values. I feel more confident sharing what I am thinking or saying that something does not comport with my beliefs.

Theme 2: The church and fellow Catholics should give vocal support for LGBTQIA+ Catholics

Holy Trinity has developed a reputation as being welcoming and encouraging to the LGBTQIA+ community, though there are perceptions that more can be done. Frustrations and desolations around the state of LGBTQIA+ acceptance and inclusion in the wider church is noted.

Below are a selection of the quotes and paraphrased statements from our sessions and surveys. There were many cases of repeat statements across groups and sessions, therefore some repetition has been omitted for length and clarity.

Being LGBTQIA+ in the Catholic Church

- It is not always possible to “find the right space” for someone like me. There are parts of me that the Church doesn’t accept as an organized religion (queer woman).
- I have often felt simply “tolerated” in church activities.
- The Church has to make more space.
- LGBTQ+ community is supported by Pope Francis, but the institution is not moving.
- The church has to have more space to be open to listening to LGBTQIA and welcoming them. Not all churches do. To create space for these people who are in the shadows who may be able to show their whole self. The church is part of the reason why [being LGBTQIA+] is illegal in other countries. To create more space here and everywhere, [the Church] needs to change that piece of the catechism.
- There are 1000s of parishes [in the US] and New Ways Ministry only lists about 200 parishes that are LGBT friendly. This topic must be raised from the grassroots. It is important that we name LGBT and not be afraid to say it. Raise this issue to the ADW, national level, and to Rome.
- One member said that he still loves to the Church but found it difficult to be accepted for being LGBTQIA+ as well as the excessive moralizing re: abortion and sexual teachings
- One attendee noted that she just doesn’t see space for herself as a gay woman in Catholicism
- One attendee noted that pursuing a vocation within the Church means that everything pro-LGBTQIA+ is “watched” and there’s very limited ability to create a more open space.
- I am a bisexual woman who often felt pressured to hide who I am, both in LGBTQ+ groups and the wider Church

Perspectives of Family, Friends, and Allies

- A parishioner has gay/lesbian friends and gay goddaughter. She’s glad that parish has working groups, but wonders if the national church can ever grow up. Is she supporting an institution that hurts people she loves and cares about?
- We have to help LGBTQIA+ partners, colleagues, come out and have a life in the Church that is recognized and that isn’t conditional-live together, married, no limitation on sexual acts and the like. The Church must focus on the commitment and love, remember that God is love.

- There is extra angst in a parent who questions their own faith, feeling that the church won't support their [LGBTQIA+] child.
- A parishioner noted that she is invited to participate but her transgender child is not and that she had to throw off the church to be herself
- I don't know how to approach Catholics who have left the Church because the scope of their hurt stops me. How can I even mention the Church to them?
- My child is angry at the Church because of maltreatment of friends who are gay--not at Holy Trinity, but elsewhere in the Church. It is the reason she left the Church.
- One member went to sponsor her niece for Confirmation in a more conservative diocese and she was forced to sign a paper as to whether her marriage was recognized by the Church. She ultimately signed but was incredibly distressed by having to lie and her wife was too nervous to go, in case they were asked about the paper.
- Allies also get treated poorly by the Church, when they want to support their LGBTQIA+ friends and loved ones.

Overall Concerns and Perspectives

- The USCCB has single handedly raised millions of dollars for anti-LGBTQIA+ causes and has openly admitted they will fight any human rights legislation that supports LGBTQIA+ rights. A parishioner noted that every time money is collected in the offerings, a portion of that goes to support them. This issue should be raised when discussing finances.
- Space is difficult to find in the Catholic Church because the diocese itself has to be friendly and the expectation is for the laity to remain docile, rather than working in conjunction with the bishop and the diocese.
- Note of hope: None of the workers of great cathedrals saw their work finished. One parishioner noted that she likes to be like water and flow through the cracks--eventually, water wears down stones. When she baptized her daughter, she was the one who got the Rite to be more inclusive. She is asked for advice and perspective with regard to LGBTQIA+ support in the parish. Eventually, things open up and change.
- Women/LGBTQIA+: I find that, as an LGBTQIA+ woman, a lot of our issues tend to go hand in hand. I do think Trinity has started really becoming a space for both groups and I appreciate the Pope being more open to at least acknowledging us and our gifts. I'd say the Church as a whole has a long way to go on both fronts.
- As a LGBTQIA+ woman, a lot of our issues tend to go hand in hand. Holy Trinity is good but the Church as a whole has a long way to go on both fronts.
- Too much of the "compassion" for LGBT persons is not actually compassionate--it is judgemental and exclusionary. It makes me so angry.
- Growing up Catholic, it felt as though certain types of families were put on a pedestal.

Pastoral Support for LGBTQIA+ People

- Many people brought up their negative experiences with priests.
- Even priests who are friendly might brush off concerns of harassment with "just ignore it," rather than provide pastoral support

- One member noted that, when first coming out, she asked if it was better to have sexual relationships with multiple men vs. a longterm, monogamous relationship with a woman. The priest said yes, because of procreation. She noted that this is an incredible double standard.
- Priests cannot participate in same gender marriages officially, but some won't even do things like say Mass for the family for that weekend (outside of the wedding ceremony). It's been noted that priests will bless cars, houses, etc., but not a couple. LGBTQIA+ families need support from their pastors.
- Priests have responded to vulnerable confessions of coming out with comparisons to being straight men who live celibate lives.
- One parishioner noted her mother was told by her pastor to not go to same-gender weddings, even if they took place outside of the Church, or even to go to the reception afterward.
- Refreshing support: when priests respond to a parishioner coming out with openness, honesty about the Church's limitations, and kindness.

Theme 3: Women should have a greater role in the Church

Significant concern was voiced over the role of women in the church and the need for greater responsibility to be given to women in leadership, particularly around worship. Female priests and deacons were a consistent topic of conversation. Most voiced strong support for women to have official, pastoral roles but also voiced their doubt that the Church would be willing to make that change.

Below are a selection of the quotes and paraphrased statements from our sessions and surveys. There were many cases of repeat statements across groups and sessions, therefore some repetition has been omitted for length and clarity.

Discussion of Women as Priests and Deacons

- Can't be inclusive if we're saying things like women can't be priests because Jesus was a man.
- It's hard to get past the fact that women can't be ordained, can't justify why women aren't celebrating the sacrament.
- Eucharist is a sin of discrimination because there's no women on the altar at all.
- An outcome of the Synod that could help this would be ordination of women to the Permanent Diaconate.
- Since the Church does not allow for or acknowledge the highest callings or vocations of women, it's hard to see how the organization can be seen as authentic

Visibility of Women in Lay Leadership

- There is a lack of space for women to speak (women's participation lacks visibility)
- The Pope is trying with appointing women into leadership positions, but he has a big fight on his hands.

- At the local and diocesan level, we need to do a better job even if we can't get Rome to change that woman can't be in hierarchy.
- Women are leaving or angry at the Church because of prohibitions against women priests and limits on women in laity positions. The role of women in laity is large but needs to be larger and more powerful and visible.

Overall Perception of and Role of Women

- Catholic rituals themselves — even in a welcoming and open parish — support the marginalization of women.
- One speaker felt hindered from speaking up because she is a woman. It's important for women to be heard if not they are not to become dejected and give up.
- Women need to be almost militant to be seen as a vital part of the Church and be seen and heard.
- Treatment of women [by the Church] is a real impediment.
- Clericalism is a *male* clericalism that affects women. It has contributed to a politicization of the episcopacy that is more interested in a political agenda than in the gospel of Christ.
- I have a hard time defending the Church's position toward women.
- Women are not equal in the Church.
- Church believes we're made in the image and likeness of God but can't let everyone be priest, prophet, and king.
- Pope is listening to needs of the people generally, but not as much for women. The American hierarchy is deaf.
- Too much commentary on reproductive health from people who are not women.

Theme 4: Young Catholics are unlikely to return to the Church until it makes fundamental changes

Young adults are active at Holy Trinity and the Young Adult Community is one of the most active in the DC area. But young adult participation in Catholicism overall is declining. The below talks about some of the potential causes and the ways in which it may be able to be addressed.

Below are a selection of the quotes and paraphrased statements from our sessions and surveys. There were many cases of repeat statements across groups and sessions, therefore some repetition has been omitted for length and clarity.

Voices of Active Young Adult Catholics

- When she was growing up, the Church structure was not welcoming to her and her family as refugees. The idea of not feeling inclusive is not a new thing.
- Seeing my non-Catholic spouse ignored or excluded in other churches--passed over when she asks for a blessing in the communion line--makes me so mad. It is hypocrisy.
- The Church needs to more broadly apply restorative justice principles, especially with respect to areas in the Global South where the Church has a harmful legacy.

- Overemphasis on tradition turns me away from the Church. It is as though others are trying to show that they are “super-Catholics.”
- I hope that the Synod brings new life into the Church and that the Holy Spirit guides the Pope and the Bishops to true faith and loving action. The church’s position on women, sexuality and birth control are very challenging for us (young people).
- The fact that we have to ask these questions is concerning. “Catholic” means “universal.” If these groups are excluded, we are failing in our mission. Loving HT is great--but the fact that we are an exception, but that is a problem.
- The Young Adult Community (YACs) makes me feel welcome.

Voices of Parents of Young Adults

- One member said that his sons are not practicing Catholics because "they don't like the management." This is understandable."
- Two adult children who are very socially responsible in their own ways but no longer have any connection to the Catholic church. Live their professional lives in very noble ways but do not participate in organized religion.
- As a parent of teenagers, it is hard to engage the entire family and teens question church values
- As a parent of a LGBTQ teenager, positive steps like inviting J. Martin, S.J. have been a source of hope and attraction to the church
- My adult children (two are active Catholics and two are not) have no respect for the institutional church, and the continual drip, drip, drip of child abuse stories turns them off more.

Questions on the Future of the Church and Retaining Young People

- Why are the younger generation leaving in droves? They are the future of the Church. They see the Church on the wrong side of issues, such as the treatment of LGBTQIA+, women priests, married priests, reproductive issues.
- People who have left will not come back until the church respects women more and changes its stance on birth control.

Supporting the Next Generation

- Children don’t see children being lectors or ministers, don’t see themselves at these Masses, and don’t see themselves engaged
- Reach out more to younger people, to pull them in as lectors and Eucharistic ministers.
- Be obvious about welcoming LGBTQ youth.
- Young people need to be empowered and equipped, not merely invited, and welcomed. The Church is not grooming young leaders
- For the synod, it would be really nice if we could educate kids and the youth about the synod and get their views.

Theme 5: Recognize that the Church is the people, not just the hierarchy

Participants focused on the Church being the people, the lay, and the parishioners and not just those that lead it. Many mentioned remembering where the church came from and why it exists in the first place. Others made the important distinction between church and parish. Some mentioned feelings of isolation or the worry of not belonging outside of Holy Trinity and felt concerned if they should need to find another parish one day. However, others also noted the connections they feel with other Catholics and the sense of belonging they have overall as a part of the people of the church.

Below are a selection of the quotes and paraphrased statements from our sessions and surveys. There were many cases of repeat statements across groups and sessions, therefore some repetition has been omitted for length and clarity.

Remember Our Origins as Catholics

- God is in the community.
- We should not forget the central message - Jesus.
- Church has to engage people in the true reason of faith – particularly explain why it is – and how it is – church of love.
- Right now, it seems like we have so much organization that it gets in the way of being a community of faith and sharing.
- The church needs to address teaching how to live as Jesus did and not put so much time and energy into protecting the structure and the hierarchy.
- The church must listen to all voices. Jesus welcomed Lepers, Samaritans, Tax Collectors, and appointed as the head of his church a man who had a mother-in Law. But we exclude people based on rules written in a feudal period known as the Dark Ages.

Church Structure and Formation

- One of the challenges is the formation of priests-many priests go to seminary and are exposed to abortion as the only social justice issue, that can be addressed in Rome-widen the understanding of priests of social justice issues, and of course, women's ordination
- Many parishes haven't embraced Vatican II doctrines, so there is a lack of interest and involvement in the reforms which occurred so long ago.
- If the Church doesn't adapt and grow, it will die.
- Pre-Vatican II traditionalists who see themselves as "more Catholic" than us, are boxing us out of the universal Church. They are using the liturgy as a weapon of exclusion.
- Having married priests would help the Church understand how messy life really is.

Proactively Involve Laity and Reduce Clericalism

- Creating more ways for others to be involved in the Church, as people of God not as part of a hierarchy, will bring more people in as they recognize that they are Church.
- Clericalism is an evil. The power imbalance between the church/clergy and parishioners is a problem
- Church needs to open and change – Episcopal and Protestant Churches have an annual discussion using dispute resolution process which allows them to make changes in a timely fashion.
- Laity are wholly equals with the clergy in a parish and they must be treated like that.
- Clericalism and fear of institutional embarrassment has led to the sex abuse scandals, and other issues.
- All laity are marginalized in the current structure with the few exceptions of those who might work on episcopal conference or diocesan levels or the very few who may serve as members or consultors of Vatican offices. Thus, marginalized groups within the faithful have even fewer chances of being heard and represented.
- The church is structured for the ordained to speak and members listen. Unlike most parishes in the U.S., Holy Trinity devotes attention to listening through its many and diverse ministries.
- Holy Trinity needs to take advantage of the room this Pope gives us to engage the laity. I am afraid to get involved because the parish will think I am too forceful or radical.

Concern Regarding United States Conference of Bishops and U.S. Catholic Church

- What is troubling is the extent to which the wider church in the United States, particularly the bishops, seem to be in the thrall of big money, the Napa Institute, the president of Home Depot, etc.
- Francis reminds us we don't need a totalitarian church. Job of bishops is to interpret what we believe rather than tell us what we believe.
- I don't like the control that the Bishops Conference seems to have over the church.
- We should be asking the Church to be simple in lifestyle. Get out of Bishops' residences, for example.
- Parts of the national "Church" don't give people opportunities to engage.
- Decided not to have anything to do with the hierarchy– her prayer life cannot be stolen by the male-dominated hierarchy.
- It's hard to be in institution where American bishops are so off the rails, while Cardinals are in a much better place.
- Too many bishops of this country who focus on abortion to exclusion of all other issues and even ignore Francis's comments about abortion in context of societal factors.

Importance of Community

- I'm often surprised when I start to talk about my faith at work how often other Catholics speak up and connect.
- Church does not equal parish.

- Small group involvement and small group invitations are so important. This needs to happen more broadly--with women, laypersons, and deacons organizing these groups--if we are going to fully receive Vatican II.
- Be creative and intentional in how we invite people. Be open to challenging questions.

The Synod Process

- There is concern about how even this Synod will be handled. Reports will go to the bishops and then to Rome. Where is the transparency in the process?
- I am inspired by the synod process, and the Pope telling the bishops to listen to us.

Church Division and Need for More Inclusion

- We don't know how to encounter people in the Church and in the society with whom we do not agree.
- The Church seems eager to define the "other": if you don't agree with one issue, then you are not a good Catholic.
- The potential for a schism seems real.
- I feel as though the conservative leaders of the Church want me to leave.
- We don't do well in recognizing that we are a multicultural institution.
- The institution has not been dealing visibly with systemic issues, especially racism.
- In the Church, there is a lack of uplifting the spiritual needs of marginalized voices, not just their material needs.
- US Catholic Church needs to overcome the mentality that only the Anglos are educated, true Catholics
- Church should support causes that rest with the people (supporting the poor and marginalized, rather than constant moralizing about LGBTQIA+ identities and abortion). An example given was the comparable small amount of support given to the legal assistance of immigrants and refugees, while the need is so great.
- The Church isn't here to listen or not to listen to the margins; the church is the margins, and we are failing to be Church by ignoring the margins
- The Church made it very hard to marry the Catholic I love.
- Holy Trinity and Church has focused on the marginalized, but the Church needs to remember to support those who continue to try to raise a family (mother, father, kids) in a household in the Catholic faith, in the face of tides of personal and societal challenges.

Report Submitted to the Archdiocese of Washington

The Archdiocese of Washington (ADW) required submission of feedback in the below format with a maximum word count. As a result, the full report was condensed into a summary. You can read the full submission below.

A Synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.” How is this “journeying together” happening today in your parish? How is the Holy Spirit inviting your parish community to grow in “journeying together?” Where in these experiences do you hear the voice of the Holy Spirit?

About 300 parishioners and friends have contributed to our discussions during four listening sessions organized by the Parish Council, sessions by groups and ministries, and in an online survey. We used restorative practices to keep the conversations open and allow all to contribute. In total, Holy Trinity has spent about 20 hours in synod thus far. In this document and on our parish website, we outlined the themes we heard. Perhaps the most important conclusion is that our community wants to continue to synod. We are exploring ways to bring together Catholics and others affiliated with Holy Trinity for continued discussion and connection.

- I am inspired by the synod process, and the Pope telling the bishops to listen to us.
- This process is heartwarming and makes me feel good; even the anger is positive.
- There is concern about how even this Synod will be handled. Reports will go to the bishops and then to Rome. Where is the transparency in the process?
- Hearing everyone share in this session has been very heartening.
- Experiences like this session make me feel welcome at Holy Trinity and help me feel welcome in the Church.
- Holy Trinity is the mustard seed for a more welcoming Church, and we must not hide under a bushel.
- What we do as a group in the synod needs to be taken seriously.
- Holy Trinity’s final report should be stark and frank about the U.S. Catholic hierarchy having been racist, anti-woman, and bigoted.

How is God speaking to us through the voices that are in our midst? How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore, including those on the peripheries? What space is there to listen to the voices on the peripheries, especially cultural groups, women, the disabled, those who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion?

Holy Trinity’s LGBTQIA+ ministry and the ministry to divorced and separated Catholics stand out for parishioners who are otherwise disenfranchised by the church.

- A parishioner with gay friends and relatives is glad that parish has working groups but wonders if national church can ever grow up and stop hurting people she loves.
- Help LGBTQIA+ partners, colleagues, come out and have a place in the Church that isn't conditional. The Church must focus on the commitment and love, remember that God is love.

Participants encouraged the parish to be courageous in creating significant and visible roles for women, in contrast to the wider Church.

- I have a hard time defending the Church's position toward women.
- Catholic rituals themselves support the marginalization of women.
- The Church believes we're made in the image and likeness of God but can't let everyone be priest, prophet, and king.
- Women need to be almost militant to be seen as a vital part of the Church and be heard.

Our Social Justice program is significant in donating treasure and in reaching different groups in need.

- In the Church, there is a lack of uplifting the spiritual needs of marginalized, not just their material needs.
- Our work with people who don't look like us or share our background should not be limited to social services; we need to worship together.
- We should make our parish more obviously welcoming to a diverse population.

What enables or hinders you from speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in your parish and society? What space is there in your parish for the voice of people, including active and inactive members of our faith?

At our synod sessions and on our synod survey, parishioners spoke candidly about change they would like to see in the entire Catholic church.

- I feel Catholic at Holy Trinity but not in the greater church.
- I have to explain to my friends and family why I am still Catholic.

It is not uncommon for our parishioners to speak up. In the past six years, we have held several series of listening sessions on a range of difficult and not so difficult topics: a parish-wide strategic planning series; a series following the most revelations of sexual abuse in the church (Pennsylvania Attorney General; Cardinal McCarrick); smaller sessions to determine the response to the pandemic.

- I was heartened to receive the statement by the Holy Trinity PPC about not denying Communion to political figures.
- The bishops have come down hard on Biden for abortion, but the silence about Trump's executions was deafening.

Holy Trinity's retreat programs are open to parishioners and non-parishioners, to Catholics and non-Catholics.

- You offer the Spiritual Exercises to laypeople; that is a real gift.
- Inclusion of lay homilists and speakers is very important.
- Liturgies of the Word practiced during COVID have led to spiritual community and creativity.

How are the baptized members of your parish able to participate in the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel? What hinders people from being active in your parish? How is authority or governance exercised in your local parish? How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice in your local parish?

The Parish Council and the staff of the parish are connected directly and via committees of parishioners. Laypeople chair the committees. The synod demonstrated that parishioners are willing to lend their opinions and advice. There is a collaborative relationship between the Pastor and the Parish Council. Baptized non-clergy serve the parish in several spiritual roles as well: Spiritual Directors, liturgical ministry, delivering reflections as part of daily emailed homilies.

- The Jesuit nature of Holy Trinity is a breath of fresh air. The Jesuits are courageous, intellectual, willing to act and take risks. How can this radiate beyond our parish and help recenter the Church?
- Zoom makes it so much easier for me to participate and to engage in a greater way.
- The parish seems to be aligned along political and social justice issues. Everyone should be welcome.
- The Church seems eager to define the “other”: if you don’t agree with one issue, then you are not a good Catholic.
- Church should be a safe haven for everyone to be accepted, regardless of politics, race, orientation, or how active they are in the Church.
- As a Christian who is non-Catholic, I get blessed in the communion line at Holy Trinity. Churches in Virginia have just looked past me and not acknowledged me.
- Catholic means universal. If groups are excluded, we are failing in our mission. Loving Holy Trinity is great; but the fact that we are an exception is a problem.

How does your parish use the methods of listening and speaking (consultation) to make decisions? How does your parish promote participation in decision-making within the hierarchical structures of the Church? Does the decision-making methods of your parish help you to listen to all members of the community, including those who are on the peripheries of parish life?

The Synod reminded our parishioners that their voices are welcome. Every Parish Council meeting is open to parishioners. The homilies at our parish are bold and sometimes challenge the church hierarchy. The accessible Synod sessions (via Zoom) drew out more voices. We will continue these discussions. Some views from participants:

- Teamwork with Ignatian Spirituality has informed their work: reconsider other viewpoints.
- Great teamwork in parish; wider Church is a challenge.
- Needs to be open to increasing use of lay people as need arises.

Holy Trinity synod participants were frustrated by the hierachal structures beyond the parish:

- We need to look back at the Church's beginnings, with smaller communities and no priests. How do we get back to the small groups of the early days?
- Clericalism is an evil. The power imbalance between the church/clergy and parishioners is a problem.
- What is troubling is the extent to which the wider church in the U.S., particularly the bishops, seem to be in the thrall of big money, the Napa Institute, the president of Home Depot, etc.
- I don't like the control that the Bishops Conference seems to have over the church.
- Francis reminds us we don't need a totalitarian church. The job of bishops is to interpret what we believe rather than tell us what we believe.
- Often the laity looks to the clergy to confirm everything which makes it hard for staff to lead and share; the laity thus unwittingly support clericalism.

How does prayer and liturgical celebrations, especially Sunday Mass, inspire and guide your parish? How does your prayer life and celebration of the Mass inspire and inform your personal decisions and decisions in the parish community? How does the parish invite all baptized Catholics, including our ethnic communities, youth, families and persons with disabilities and their families, into the active life of the parish, especially Sunday Mass?

Our voices speak for themselves:

- Ignatian Spirituality is primary at our parish, and it helps us move deeper into a relationship with God than rote participation in Catholic mass would.
- Homilies on email have nourished me. I have especially appreciated reflections from women parishioners.
- We need to better understand the liturgy and its background and history. Everyone should understand that we pray as a group.
- The inability to attend Mass during the pandemic was very challenging.
- Having a community to connect with is an essential part of my spiritual life.
- Homilies at Holy Trinity connect what is important to me socially to my prayer life.
- Homilies at Holy Trinity are intellectually and spiritually challenging.
- Women need to be able to give homilies at Mass.
- The Young Adult Community exposed me to different points of view and transformed my spirituality.
- It is possible to have a spiritual life outside of attending Mass; many of the young people who have stopped attending Mass are still maintaining a spiritual life. How can the Church support them?
- Prayer life has been inspired when talking about preferential option for the poor and discussions on the teachings of Romero and others like that. Wants to have more options to share. Organizing around more topics and ecumenical involvement.

Spiritual Exercises are significant to be able to receive the strength of the Holy Spirit through prayer. Small prayer groups have been key to liturgy.

Holy Trinity Parish Specific Feedback

The below are comments received during the Synod listening process that reflected on Holy Trinity parish, what's going well, and how the parish can improve. The concerns noted here are being addressed by the Parish Pastoral Council and being brought to the appropriate committees or staff for review and potential action.

Overall Positive Comments

- Homilies on email have nourished me. I have especially appreciated reflections from women parishioners.
- Daily prayer sessions on Zoom have been so meaningful. These practices need to continue post-COVID.
- I have been so impressed with Holy Trinity's virtual offerings since 2020. My family watches mass weekly as a family, I listen to the homily podcasts daily on PodBean, and we are involved in virtual retreats, such as the JustFaith offerings.
- The YACs make me feel welcome.
- The online daily prayers and homilies are very welcome. One of the positives to come out of the pandemic!
- Virtual morning and evening prayer sessions enhanced my experience in the parish.
- Tuesday Night online Rosary.
- Migrant team group. The sense of mission in that group demonstrates what our faith is.

Worship

- It is not always easy to find out how to help at Mass as Eucharistic ministers, lectors, etc. The process should be more open and evident.
- HT does not reach out enough to get people involved. I have called and volunteered for notice in the bulletin, and staff never call or email back.
- No follow-up by HT when he was proactive in volunteering to be a lector
Called HT several times and followed through on training but was never scheduled.
- Better communication is needed on those who can participate in mass by being lectors, ministers, acolytes, etc.
- Staff in RE have not responded to my emails--four times--even after sending in money and registration for class.
- Staff and ministry leaders are unresponsive to email. It makes it hard to get involved.
- It is hard to get involved in a meaningful way. Staff and ministry leaders shut down new ideas.
- The 40-page book of wedding rules at Holy Trinity made me want to cry. All I saw were rules, most of them more restrictive than those of other parishes. I did not see a community celebrating in my sacrament.
- The wedding rules are onerous and turn off new married couples.
- An organization that is as heavily volunteer-driven as the Religious Education program does need more full-time support from the Church in order to educate and provide tools and resources to those volunteers. While all the catechists in the RE program are very

well-meaning, they are at the end of the day volunteers who don't necessarily have a teaching background and may not be intimately acquainted with the curriculum.

- For the first time in my life, this past spring/early summer, I reached out to a priest at Holy Trinity to arrange a time to discuss some of the challenges I was having related to raising a family in the Catholic faith during the last 18 tumultuous months of societal upheaval. Appointments were cancelled and there was lack of follow up.
- The parish should be more adventurous in giving roles to women.
- Our parish has not educated us enough about the importance of the ministry of the assembly. Our celebration of Mass can be rote. The assembly should be the primary choir, for example.

Parish Life

- We should use our liturgy as a means for people to connect to each other. Meetings and discussions after Mass?
- Not sure what to do with the parish at large because it's too big. I try to get involved in smaller groups.
- Enjoy Zoom and the intimacy it brings to small groups.
- Not sure how to bring the small groups into the larger parish. One of the things to figure out is how to communicate between parish stakeholders and the parish at large
- We need to reach out to each other, participate in vibrant discussions and go through mutual sharing to reach an understanding.
- Frustrated by compartmentalization and lack of awareness on social justice issues.
- Social justice is not a core part of parish life, just there in small pieces
- Holy Trinity is generally welcoming but there is not enough integration to the care of parishioners.
- Sharing stories creates community: how do we hear from the people who come to Mass and then leave? How can people connect outside of Mass?
- Holy Trinity should update the Parish Directory so that we can build more community. Doing activities together brings the community together.
- Holy Trinity needs to do more "secular" activities like yoga, potlucks, etc. to attract new Catholics and Catholics who have left, back to the Church.
- It is difficult to speak up or listen without a sense of community, which is difficult to achieve in Catholic parishes generally but almost impossible in a non-geographic parish with so many parishioners attending so many different liturgies and living throughout an extensive metropolitan area. Catholic churches are designed for liturgical celebrations, not fostering community or fellowship. "Go, the Mass is over" gets taken as a command. Protestant churches have smaller congregations, fewer services, and time and space for members and clergy to gather and get to know each other.
- Can we, as a parish, do a Synod every year?

Facilities

- Location is a significant hurdle if you rely on mass transit

- Doesn't get to the church much outside of Mass due to logistical issues—night time is tough for driving and parking is a challenge.
- For elderly there may be other things that are a hindrance.
- Help for the hearing impaired would be a big plus.
- Maybe rides to church for those without cars.
- Reserved seating for disabled at Holy Trinity would be a big plus and it should be well-marked.

Anti-Racism

- I am disappointed to see the energy go out of activism around racial justice. Holy Trinity should be more collaborative with other churches, especially with primarily non-white churches.
- White comfort is prioritized over anti-racism.
- I feel very “other” at Holy Trinity, because of my race and because of my spouse’s (non-Catholic) faith.
- It is disheartening that so few new people have joined the parish anti-racism efforts.
- I would like to see racial/ethnic affinity groups in Holy Trinity.

Cultural Diversity

- As a woman who belongs to a minority group, she feels like Holy Trinity is not inclusive and does not welcome women and Latinos.
- As a Latina, encouraged by HT's celebration of Our Lady of Guadeloupe.
- Wants church to have some liturgical celebrations/traditions used by others (Africans as an example).
- Would benefit from exposure to different cultural traditions within the liturgy
- I would like to see racial/ethnic affinity groups in Holy Trinity.

PPC/Parish Governance

- I don't always feel heard, especially when I raise difficult issues or ways the parish can do better.
- One parishioner thinks there's been an improvement over the years, the clergy consulting with the parishioners. Views Catholic Church-Constitution: We the People is the first chapter. It's laity, then Pope, then clergy. The laity are wholly equals with the clergy in a parish and they have to be treated like that. He is not sure it's the way the parish operates. Fr. Gillespie listens to Parish Pastoral Council, sometimes comes up with something he'd like to do. We as laity have a responsibility to step up more than we do. We need to use this charism that we are a group that has much to do with success of Catholic Church as any other part, including hierarchy. What we say, do, and think, should be description of theology and priority of the Church. Need to go further in the parish. Not an indictment, but we started from day when no one listened to days when laity have power and authority.
- Another parishioner is frustrated by whom they choose to consult. Conversations have noted that the priests favor discussions with big donors, most of whom tend to be white, wealthy individuals. She wonders why we talk to big donors as opposed to the

many more people who do work and provide riches. Synod process is wonderful. She hopes that within the next two weeks, talking to younger adults and teens that more voices will be heard. She hopes the clergy read this and that they discern before the report is sent. Clergy are easily influenced by financial decisions and donors.

- Often the laity looks to clergy/priests to confirm everything which makes it hard for staff to lead and share. Holy Trinity laity unwillingly support “clericalism”.
- Do not know how decisions are made at Holy Trinity. What power does the Parish Pastoral Council really have? Who decides Priest tenure? Where is laity in making fundamental decisions at Holy Trinity?
- PPC election bios list professional experience and work at Holy Trinity. I am more interested in their priorities for making the parish more amenable to the needs of its people.
- LGBTQ+ Community has been formed, but it took a long time to make it. Its success depends on who happens to be the pastors, pastoral associates, pastoral council members.

Specific Actions

- Print Sunday homilies and post on the website. They get shared and touch a lot of people if they were sharable. The daily homilies get shared, but not the Sunday ones.
- Family life really hinders me from being active. It is really hard to have young children and be active in the parish.
- Lack of active Parents of Young Children’s group which would build community. Also, husband is protestant and his church was very active in physical support (meals delivered as example).
- Holy Trinity does a good job advocating for children from a social justice perspective but needs to do a better job of looking within our own pews.
- Can the church work towards creating/sharing job opportunities by engaging with Parishioners who may have access/influence?

Secular Politics

- Tired of politics and the Church being part of the weekly message and part of the weekly newsletter as we feel the Church has become too Democratically leaning and pushes for Social causes and not Catholic causes.
- Lately, I feel less engaged and welcomed at Holy Trinity. The banner in front of the church sends us the message that Holy Trinity is supporting a political group that does not support organized religion, traditional family as well as other political viewpoints.
- Feeling particularly unsupported by the church in raising our children in the Catholic faith, particularly with the current social upheaval regarding gender fluidity and other cancel culture messages. We are for social progress, but not for destruction of all social norms.
- We find the messages at homilies not directed towards those trying to raise children (older children) in the church. Do not believe that some people are inherently bad and others are inherently good/victims.

- Stay true to our Jesuit Catholic tenants and do not get political.
- You are losing us as you are speaking and writing too much about special interest groups...you are going to lose our young adults and especially our daughters.

General Comments about the Parish

- Holy Trinity is overconfident in “How good we are”.
- Trinity is welcoming, but it is difficult for newcomers to feel they can break into the tight knit communities that have formed. We love the parish so much that we can be intimidating.
- We should do more to address the institutional factors that cause people to be marginalized.
- Holy Trinity needs to take advantage of the room this Pope gives us to engage the laity. I am afraid to get involved because the parish will think I am too forceful or radical.
- There are times when I feel this is a parish of “haves” serving “have nots.” When I have not felt like a “have,” I have not felt able to contribute. So many of the social justice events assume you have time, energy/ability, a car, and resources to buy things.
- I believe now, more than ever, the Church (both the broader Church, as well as Holy Trinity) needs to consider how best to engage youth, in the way that they expect to be engaged: digitally, through social media, speaking their language.

Overall Positive Comments

- Homilies on email have nourished me. I have especially appreciated reflections from women parishioners.
- Daily prayer sessions on Zoom have been so meaningful. These practices need to continue post-COVID.
- I have been so impressed with Holy Trinity's virtual offerings since 2020. My family watches mass weekly as a family, I listen to the homily podcasts daily on PodBean, and we are involved in virtual retreats, such as the JustFaith offerings.
- The YACs make me feel welcome.
- The online daily prayers and homilies are very welcome. One of the positives to come out of the pandemic!
- Virtual morning and evening prayer sessions enhanced my experience in the parish.
- Tuesday Night online Rosary.
- Migrant team group. The sense of mission in that group demonstrates what our faith is.

The Synod Listening Process at Holy Trinity Parish

About 300 parishioners and friends contributed to our discussions during eight listening sessions and a survey organized by the Parish Pastoral Council. Several existing groups and ministries also held their own Synod sessions following the same model. We used restorative practices to keep the conversations open and allow all to contribute. In total, Holy Trinity has spent about 20 hours in synod thus far. In this document, we outlined the themes we heard, but perhaps the most important conclusion is that our community wants to continue to

synod. We are exploring ways to bring together Catholics and others affiliated with Holy Trinity for continued discussion and connection.