

Holy Trinity Remembers . . .

A Catholic Church in Georgetown Explores Its Racial Past

by Linda L. Gray

As a child, I always knew my Grandmother, Dorothy Williams Harris, to be a pillar of our church. She served as the prefect of the Sodality for many years, the organizer and first president of the Ladies of Charity, and the coordinator / sponsor for children going to the St. Florence and St. Vincent Camps for the summer. She and my Grandfather, Lester Louis Harris, Sr., raised eleven children at Epiphany Catholic Church, and she sponsored many of those who converted to Catholicism. She was part of the exodus from Holy Trinity Catholic Church in the 1920s, due to racial discrimination, and was a charter member of a new movement to build a Black Catholic Church in Georgetown. It is the church my Mother, Dorothy Harris Gray, and I continue to attend.

Although I knew the reason Black Catholics left Holy Trinity Catholic Church, I did not know the harsh truth or the details of the mistreatment of Black people who were baptized there and supported the church despite its racial practices. Elders like my Grandmother protected us from knowing what really happened in church. It wasn't until I participated in the pilgrimage at Holy Trinity in April 2022, and sat in the once-segregated balcony, that I gained a clear understanding of how it must have felt to be denied and disrespected in The House of God. Emotionally, I was everywhere and very angry. Working through those emotions I realized how strong and determined my Grandmother and all the members of the church had to be when they decided to leave, to never look back, and to never return. Unwavering faith gave them the strength to build a church where they were free to worship. Determination allowed them to flourish. Their success is to be celebrated and their courage is to be respected in the highest regard.

It also takes courage for Holy Trinity Catholic Church to acknowledge that it failed its Black parishioners in so many ways. It's a hard and embarrassing truth to face. However difficult it may be, the truth is the necessary path for every step in the process of reconciliation. The effort to get to that place has not been fully realized, but the work

that has produced these powerful and factual articles is authentic and serves as a huge leap to move us forward. It has helped me, and I cherish my ancestors even more for their struggle.

These articles are a must read! The truth of what happened is painful as well as healing. To those Black parishioners who felt compelled to leave Holy Trinity Catholic Church, this is their story of faith, hope, and empowerment. This is their truth. and it's their truth that sets us free!