



HOLY SPIRIT CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Summary of our parish's synodal process and a description of the fruits of our communal and spiritual journey – April 2022

The entire synodal process has resulted in our parish taking new steps in growing our understanding of the Holy Spirit. It provided new opportunities for listening and dialogue by addressing questions that we've never asked our faith community before, such as, "In what way have you experienced the Holy Spirit?" In answering this type of question, our parishioners engaged in conversation at a different level and learned about one another's experiences of the Holy Spirit.

Certain themes emerged in our dialogue, the first being that we found the Holy Spirit in worshipping and prayer. Parishioners said they found God with their families by going to Church. The Mass and the other sacraments made the most significant contributions. The places where people felt closest to God included: in Church during Mass; within private/quiet prayer; and in the Adoration Chapel. Our parishioners identified local characteristics that had the most positive influences on them as our parish priest, church activities and the Ministries.

In discussions about "journeying together" a second theme emerged: it became evident that our parish highly values the experiences of building up our Church as the Body of Christ through the Holy Spirit. We are a small parish and many people experience our Church as family. One parishioner said, "*By volunteering at Church we have become like brothers.*" Our parishioners described memories of the Holy Spirit being with them at Mass even during the beginning of the pandemic. "*During early COVID I couldn't come to Mass, so I watched it on livestream and listened to the music. We were sitting apart and lonely, but for 45 minutes we could experience love together.*"

Music was frequently cited as adding to the spiritual experience. One parishioner said, "*Music definitely moved us and brought us closer to the Holy Spirit.*" Another person shared a memory, "*One particular memory that I have is of the Healing Mass, people came forward for a Blessing and the choir sang. It is a memory that I can never forget. I knew the Holy Spirit was here, healing people, healing us.*"

In addition to positive experiences, parishioners also shared their concerns and worries. The biggest concern was for teens and young adults because of what was perceived as their lack of participation at Church. Because of this result from the survey, we held a focus group where we invited a couple of students from each class of 8th through 12th grade. It was a good mix of students who attend different public schools and different activities. While our

Parish Council had been discussing youth involvement and possibly hiring a youth minister, the synod directives and our parish survey led us to create this focus group and question students directly about their faith. The feedback, indicating that there was a sense that the intercession and homily were not geared towards their lives and that Mass, as well as the homily, just sounded like a bunch of constant noise, was very enlightening. While most of them prayed, almost all of them felt uncomfortable being identified praying or as part of a church group in front of their peers. They also said they would do social things with church peers on a weeknight but not on a weekend. Furthermore, many said they most likely would want to do social things, not on church property, rather than meet or do events on campus. Most of this information was beyond what the adults were planning and thinking and so the synodal spirit of listening was extremely fruitful. Finally, the focus group demonstrated glimpses of spiritual sparks as some students took ownership of their faith when given the opportunity to talk.

Parishioners also expressed concerns about family and friends who no longer practice the Catholic faith. We developed a survey for non-practicing Catholics and 47 people completed it. Approximately one half of them indicated that they would consider identifying as Catholic again. At the Town Hall meeting one parishioner spoke about her daughter who they asked to take the survey and then she started to attend Mass again!

Certain milestones occurred in our synodal journey, specifically the creation of new steps to listen to one another. We developed and implemented survey tools for parishioners and non-practicing Catholics utilizing Survey Monkey. This entailed setting up questions and realizing a learning curve within a short time. This information was utilized for creating additional questions for the Town Hall meeting. The Town Hall meeting was a significant milestone in our process. This dialogue and listening session presented meaningful reflections from parishioners about their experiences of the Holy Spirit while acknowledging that the gifts of the Spirit are different from one person to the next. One person said, *“I think there are many different ways to find the Spirit. It makes me realize that we are all different, and there are different ways to get there, to know and love God. Each person has a different way.”*

We were interested in getting the widest participation possible for the synodal process and at different levels. We held meetings involving the Synod/Survey Committee, the Parish Staff, the Parish Council, a Focus Group, and a Town Hall Meeting. Two surveys were distributed online and in print. A total of 308 people completed the surveys. Attendance at the Town Hall was approximately 100 people on site and 247 livestream.

Our synodal activities can be considered a beginning step. Our parish priest and the Parish Council are involved in further development and planning. The lessons that we learned about how to reach and listen to one another will be used as we continue to move forward. We are building upon a re-invigorated Church community that is talking about the Holy Spirit in their lives. As one parishioner said at the Town Hall, *“I believe that the Holy Spirit reaches you in every possible way in your life.”*