

THE ROLE OF HOLY TRINITY PARISH IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND JESUIT IDENTITY

Parish Pastoral Council
Holy Trinity Parish
Washington, USA

Introduction

The parishioners of Holy Trinity Church are a diverse group drawn from nearly every corner of the Washington metropolitan area. We are young and old, urban and suburban, and economically and sociologically diverse. We come from far and near to Holy Trinity. Some say it is for the beauty and energy of the liturgies, others for the vitality and intellectual stimulation of the preaching; and still others are attracted by the superb adult and youth education programs and spiritual activities that support their personal journeys of faith. Parishioners frequently describe Holy Trinity as a vibrant Christian community energized with countless service and parish life projects. One needs only to look at a church bulletin on any given Sunday to witness the breadth and depth and dynamic nature of Holy Trinity parish.

Many members of our parish attribute the vitality that characterizes Holy Trinity to our roots as a Jesuit parish. Yet, while inspired and energized by the Jesuits who reside here and the vibrancy of the Holy Trinity “experience,” relatively few among us can articulate the fundamental principles of Ignatian spirituality or Jesuit traditions. It is our sense that a persistent yearning exists within our parish for a deeper understanding of and dialogue about the basic forces that drive our attraction to Holy Trinity, namely our Jesuit traditions and identity and the spirituality of St. Ignatius and his companions.

Our Mission as a Jesuit Parish

Holy Trinity is a Jesuit parish because it embodies the call of the Jesuits in residence here. A Jesuit parish participates in the apostolic priorities of the Society of Jesus and in the mission plan of the Maryland Province, according to the Jesuit “way of proceeding,” and it is “energized by Ignatian spirituality” and by individual and communal discernment (*see* Decree 19 of the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus). The activities of a Jesuit parish should reflect the inner spirit of mindfulness, intentionality, and awareness that grows from Ignatian spirituality and infuses its ministries with the persistent goal of serving God, the local church, and others.

A parish reflects the call of Ignatius when its members burn with the intensity of an intimate relationship with the Lord and a passionate desire to be of service to Christ wherever that call may lead. Experience, reflection, decision, and action are the hallmarks of the Jesuit way of proceeding. In the following sections of this report, we take stock of our experience as members of the Holy Trinity parish, reflect on the lessons learned from that experience, and offer recommendations for consideration by the pastor and the Parish Pastoral Council. These recommendations provide a framework to guide future actions - while they are general in nature, the appendix to this report suggests how they might be implemented in more specific terms. Our report offers a path for moving from contemplation to action through a series of reflective deliberations and intentional efforts. It is our hope that this report will support actions by the clergy, staff, school, and diverse lay communities within our parish, to enrich the future of Holy Trinity as a Jesuit parish.

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In preparing this initial report, our Task Force seeks to develop an approach that reflects our desire to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God; to help each other grow in faith, hope, and love; and to build a world that reflects the greater glory of God, which St. Irenaeus notes, is the human person fully alive. We offer this report as a path that will allow us to draw upon Ignatian principles, build on Jesuit traditions, and embed those

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values within the circumstances of our time and place as the community of Holy Trinity Church, five centuries after the death of Ignatius Loyola.

Our Foundational Grace: Ignatian Spirituality

The legacy of St. Ignatius offers a spiritual awakening through an enduring intimacy with Christ, an intimacy that infused his ministry with a holy boldness, energized by the desire to save souls and to go where needs are not met. In embracing Ignatian spirituality as a means to foster our relationship with the Lord, we are called to find God in all things, in ourselves, and in each other. Ignatian spirituality is not just a convenient label for the religious programs offered at Holy Trinity. It is the inner core of our spiritual engine, one that ignites us with a deep love for God the Father and our Lord, Jesus Christ. It is that transforming love that infuses our ministries within the parish and with others in need. We seek, therefore, to move as many as possible to prayer and devotion in a deeper understanding of God's love for us and His call to serve those in need.

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Ignatian spirituality "opens the eyes of the believer to the needs of others and thus impels the believer to become a man or woman for others." (Byron, 2000; *see also* www.jesuit.org). We have an abundance of staff, programs, and activities at Holy Trinity that reflect this foundational grace. Our community is anchored by vibrant liturgy, grounding our work as disciples of Christ in the world. We are blessed by the presence of the Jesuit fathers who are in residence at our parish, who consistently offer spiritual leadership and counselling to others. The religious Sisters of St. Joseph also offer a spiritual resource for our parish. The lay staff share their many and diverse gifts to help make Holy Trinity an exemplary Jesuit parish. We are fortunate to have access to the retreats and spiritual direction offered through the Jesuit Center for Spirituality, including evenings of prayer that introduce and guide parishioners through methods of Ignatian prayer, and 5 day and

5 - week retreats in daily life. For those committed to a more intensive exploration of Ignatian spirituality, the parish offers nine-month, individually directed retreats based on the Exercises, in which the retreatant meets with a spiritual director weekly. In the last two years, the parish has offered this retreat to small groups of parishioners, who meet together every two weeks and are guided by experienced directors over an eight-month period.

Other resources include the scripture study program and book discussion group led by Pat Earl, S.J., and the spiritual reflection group sponsored by the Young Adult Community. More recently, Holy Trinity School has embraced Ignatian spirituality as a 'way of infusing the school community with the importance of reflection and personal examination of each student's relationship with God on a daily basis. The *Coming Home* program offers a medium of discussion for returning Catholics, while the Sunday religious education programs enroll more than 650 students from kindergarten through high school, offering weekly discussions with volunteer catechists that explore how to establish a closer relationship with Jesus, prepare for the sacraments, and manifest His love in their lives. Furthermore, online opportunities offer parishioners and others the opportunity to enter a virtual classroom with access to selected readings on spirituality, and web-based audio recordings of weekly homilies from the Sunday liturgies.

It is tempting to become complacent with this array of abundant activity and to take pride in knowing that many members of our parish are exposed to and embrace these different facets of our spiritual home. We have much to be proud of, but much more is possible. We therefore seek ways to use all available resources both to build upon what we have and to do even more in strengthening Ignatian spirituality as the foundational grace of our parish.

Strengthening Our Identity as a Jesuit Parish

Building from the foundational grace of Ignatian spirituality, we now strive to affirm and strengthen those features of our parish that reflect essential elements of Jesuit values. In this report, we have chosen six themes that reflect Jesuit traditions as the basis and guide for future attention and action in strengthening our parish:

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- Finding God in all things
- Fostering Ignatian discernment
- Striving for excellence: the Magis
- Becoming men and women for others, especially through service to the poor and the marginalized
- Serving the needs of the Church
- Building an inclusive and interactive community

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Finding God in all things. Our deep personal love of Jesus Christ impels us to labor with Jesus in spreading the good news of the Kingdom of God, helping people grow in faith, hope and love, and building a more just and gentle world. Grounded in Christ, we exercise our ministries with a holy boldness. Our Ignatian spirituality teaches us to strive to find God in all things and all people, and our Jesuit traditions teach us to express this spirituality within our culture rather than withdraw from it. Seeking always to find the good and to challenge sinful social structures, we engage every part of our culture in respectful dialogue and speak the truth of the gospel with both conviction and love. In a world marred by religious hatreds we commit ourselves to ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.

Fostering Ignatian discernment. Before acting, we ask: what will be for the *greater* glory of God? How can we *best* “help souls,” as St. Ignatius often asked during the early formative periods of the Society of Jesus? Having acted, we reflect on our experience, and consider: how have we grown in faith, hope, and love? What got in the way of our believing, hoping, and loving? In short, we strive to become contemplatives in action.

In our complex world and in a city as sophisticated as Washington, D.C., we are called to exercise and consistently seek to improve our parish ministries with clarity of thought, eloquence, ingenuity, and a focused zeal. As a community committed to education and knowledge, we bring the gospel and the Church’s rich liturgical, theological, and moral tradition to bear on modern questions and concerns. We believe, therefore, that the cultivation of this spirit of discernment should be a hallmark of all ministries at Holy Trinity, not just those concerned with spiritual development.

Striving for excellence: the Magis, “the more.” We strive for excellence in all we do, not to bring recognition to ourselves but to best serve God and others. We are not content simply with doing things as they have always been done, with the tried and true. Firmly rooted in the past, we also look ahead with great hope, imagining how we can do things more effectively or serve the more universal good. To do this, we seek to be more available, more free, and more open to embrace our mission.

Becoming men and women for others, especially through service to the poor and marginalized. We are called to live the Gospel in the world and to serve those whom Christ held most dear, the poor and marginalized. We seek to live in solidarity with those who are most in need and understand sources of injustice within our culture. This need includes not only those who are poor in material goods, but also those with ample means who still struggle to find meaning in our fast paced, competitive world where little opportunity exists to build community based on a shared faith and spiritual heritage. We do so in a spirit of mutuality, realizing that we have much to learn by the hospitality, faithfulness, and generosity of those we seek to serve.

Serving the needs of the Church. “The Society of Jesus was founded to be in service to the Church. Holy Trinity exists as part of the larger Body of Christ. We recognize our dependence on other parishes and the local bishop for our vitality as a church community. We commit ourselves to serving the larger Catholic community by offering our time, talent, and resources. We affirm that our Ignatian spirituality is a unique asset that we can offer to the larger Church, and we seek to identify ways to share this gift and our other parish ministries with others in the archdiocese through ongoing programs and relationships.

Building an inclusive and interactive community. Our parish ministries offer opportunities to extend our experience with Ignatian spirituality to other social networks and faith communities. These may include an examination of how to apply the Spiritual Exercises to our work through the creation of networks based on common professional ties, or within alumni networks that draw from the heritage of Jesuit universities or high schools. Furthermore, we seek to enrich our own spiritual strength as a reservoir to serve a broader community of new parishioners, who may

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not be familiar with the rich traditions, principles, and heritage of Ignatian spirituality and the Society of Jesus.

We strive for a more ethnically and economically diverse community that can blend multiple cultures and traditions while adhering to a core of

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shared principles of faith and spirituality. Inclusivity rejoices in the diversity of peoples and individual gifts that are essential to a rich parish life. We welcome all to worship in our local community while remaining mindful that we are a part of the larger community of humankind. Priests, religious sisters, staff, lay men and women collaborate together in the

ministries of the parish. We find strength in diversity, in the richness of God's gifts. At the same time, we appreciate our unity in Christ, which is forged by praying together and laboring together in a common mission.

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