

Report of Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church, Appomattox, to the Diocese of Richmond, on the Synod on Synodality

“A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, ‘journeys together’: How is this ‘journeying together’ happening today in your particular Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our journeying together?”

Our church is the sole Catholic church entrusted with serving three entire counties; we have a single mass on Sunday. This potentially challenging situation shapes our “journeying together” in some positive ways. Without easily accessible alternatives, local Catholics, regardless of their particular theologies or political affiliations, gather together at our parish. We find that we get along with each other, enjoy being together, and see the work of the Holy Spirit in each other. Since there is no paid staff, this is inevitably a hands-on, DIY community. Positions such as music minister, DRE, social justice coordinator, web master, maintenance, and grounds/landscapers are all volunteers. Everyone is welcome to pitch in at Our Lady of Peace, our parishioners are active and involved. Here we embody the spirit of the synod in our daily life as a parish.

Through this synodal process the Holy Spirit is suggesting that the next stage of our journey involves pushing beyond our parish’s typical cultural boundaries. We have young families, but are mostly an older parish. For the sake of the Gospel, and for the long-term health of the parish, we need to learn to reach beyond our borders. One way our parish already effectively does this is Mac’s Kitchen, our parish soup kitchen and food pantry, which is the largest such outreach by any church in our county. A number of African-American Baptist churches partner with us in this endeavor, making this outreach our primary means of ecumenical engagement. In many ways, the ideal behind what Mac’s Kitchen represents is the sort of universal church we would like to be, a church that is open to the underprivileged, marginalized and connected with other Christians.

For the most part our rural Catholic community is isolated. We feel that we are not connected to other Catholic parishes and connections and communication with the diocese could be stronger. We are not connected to the Protestant churches in our area, though they worship the same God and face many of the same challenges as we do; we could benefit from mutual prayer and support. We need to do a better job ministering to our youth and keeping them in the Church. Many of our parishioners are emphatic in their concern for issues affecting the whole Church, among which they particularly cite the sin of clericalism, the scandal of sexual abuse and its cover-up, and the continuing subordination of women at all levels of leadership. For our parish, and the Catholic Church as a whole, we hope that the synod is a first step towards a church that, with prayerful discernment, better listens to and connects with women, the youth, and all faiths.