

**Draft Report of Synod Activity and Results for the Archdiocese  
St. Thomas Aquinas Church**

**Section A: Basic Information**

- 1) Name of parish, Catholic school, campus ministry or community/group  
**St. Thomas Aquinas Church (STA)**
- 2) Address of parish, Catholic school, campus ministry or community/group  
**535 Rucker Road  
Alpharetta, GA 30004**
- 3) Name of pastor/leader  
**Msgr. Daniel Stack**
- 4) Name of person filling out this report/form; phone number; email address  
**Stephen Sheahan  
770-356-3923  
Sjsheahan50@gmail.com**

**Section B: Assessing the Synod Process within Your  
Parish/Community**

- 1) Please describe the process(es) you chose to consult your community. Please check all that apply:
  1. ☒ Option 1: One-day Prayer-Centered Listening Sessions (in-person, virtual, hybrid)
  2. ☐ Option 2: Three-day Prayer-Centered Listening Sessions (in- person, virtual, hybrid)
  3. ☒ Online Survey
  4. ☒ Other Meetings
  5. ☐ Phone Calls
  6. ☒ Something else? [Please describe.] **Our Parish Ministry Leaders (e.g., Small Faith Communities, Pastoral Council) leveraged their normal meeting schedules to incorporate consultation opportunities.**
- 2) Whom did you consult? Please check all that apply:
  - ☒ Parish/community members
  - ☒ Parish/community leadership, staff & volunteers
  - ☒ Parish councils (pastoral and finance)
  - ☒ Inactive Catholics
  - ☐ Other Christians
  - ☐ Those of other religions
  - ☐ Unaffiliated
  - ☐ Other

3) What was the best part of the process? What were the high points?

The best parts of the process were the prayerful seriousness with which the participants engaged in the process and the quality of the insights their collaborations produced. High points included:

- the work of several individuals from various ministries who facilitated multiple sessions and brought the Synod opportunity to the attention of many members of our faith community,
- the realization, reported by many, of the necessity and value of doing this work in collaboration with others, and
- the trust in our community evidenced by the many who opened their hearts to this process.

A very special high point has been the discovery that our Spanish- and English-speaking communities hold in common the strong desire to deepen and sustain a unified, inclusive family experience at St. Thomas Aquinas. Synodality has already begun to deepen our understanding of one another.

4) What was the most challenging aspect of the consultation process? What are some lessons learned?

The logistical challenge of offering a consistent experience to all the members of our very diverse parish – the Spanish-speakers as well as the English speakers, the seniors as well as the youth, and the members of ministries as well as those not affiliated with any of our 50 ministries. And the corresponding challenge of summarizing all the responses in both languages and creating a full, fair, and brief integrated summary of their insights.

5) Are there any fruits or steps that your community will be implementing as a result of this process?

Yes! A common insight identified in many of the Listening Sessions was that synodality is a process and not a time-limited event and that we, as a parish (and as an Archdiocese) need to find effective methods for sustaining this level of collaborative work. The STA Synod Project Team is recommending to our Pastor and Pastoral Council that steps be taken to create and maintain an ongoing focus on enabling synodal functioning in all our activities and ensuring that it be broadly inclusive and fully transparent.

### **Section C: Discerning Synod Feedback for the Archdiocese**

**1) Insights:** Please share four or five of the most important insights from your local synodal experience. In order to discern these fruits, we ask that you invoke the Holy Spirit for guidance. As an aid, consider the following points in your discernment:

- Consider not only reporting common trends and points of convergence, but also highlighting those points that strike a chord, inspire an original point of view or open a new horizon.
- Pay special attention to the voices of those who are not often heard or perhaps less frequently affirmed, keeping in mind the insights that can come from a minority of voices.

- Consider not only underlining positive experiences, but also bringing to light challenging and negative experiences in order to reflect the reality of what has been listened to.
- Keep in mind the experience of the local gathering: the attitudes of the participants and the joys and challenges of engaging together in prayer, listening and discernment.

### **Insight 1: The Fundamental Question**

#### **OR alternate theme:**

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.” How is this “journeying together” happening today in our parish/community? How is the Holy Spirit inviting our parish/community to grow in “journeying together?”

Members of both our English- and Spanish-speaking communities described our journeying together, when it works well, as a *close family experience*. We expressed a strong desire to be part of a close loving community where all are accepted. We believe the Holy Spirit is inviting us to take positive steps to secure and extend that experience by:

- creating new leadership opportunities within our ministries so that new voices may be heard,
- developing more consistently effective spiritual direction and education across the full range of parish opportunities: homilies, Faith Formation, and adult education, particularly in Catholic social teaching, and
- promoting more frequent and fully transparent communications about our operations, decision making, and opportunities to engage.

### **Insight 2: Listening and Discernment**

#### **Or Alternate Theme**

We are aware that the Synod itself is a listening opportunity, prompted and guided by the Holy Spirit and we expressed a strong desire that such opportunities to speak and share freely would become more commonly available. Given past experiences of listening opportunities that produced few results, many noted how important it is that we follow through on what we are hearing in these synodal encounters to rebuild trust and make synodality our ongoing practice. Devoting additional resources and focus to education is critical if we are to empower our members with the confidence to think and speak effectively about our faith and engage more fully in the life of our parish.

### **Insight 3: Co-Responsibility & Participation**

#### **OR alternate theme:**

We disclosed a strong desire to be engaged but stronger misgivings about our ability to do so effectively. The many inhibitors we cited included: lack of adult education in our faith post-Confirmation and the resulting lack of confidence in our ability to engage effectively, the lack of women in positions of leadership, conflicting views on social teaching within the church, a failure of Christian inclusivity with respect to the LGBTQ community, language barriers, and a failure to encourage the participation of children and youth. Some of us cited a lack of awareness of *how to* engage due to deficits in our communications programs. Others called for the restoration of the pre-COVID Ministry Fairs. This question prompted many practical

recommendations for positive change that will be reflected in our synod implementation program.

**Insight 4: Prayer and Celebration OR alternate theme:**

We spoke about the key role of the homily in focusing our community on the gospel and expressed a strong desire that these messages become more consistently relevant to the lives we live and the challenges we face. Practical recommendations about new voices and better support for homilists will be reflected in the parish level detailed report. In addition, a sense that we should seek to regain a focus on the social and educational support structures that draw people into the community (picnics, donuts, adult education etc.) was a common theme in this discussion. Some felt that inconsistent views within the church with respect to Catholic social teaching and the contentious environment of our world today also inhibit many of us from the fuller engagement we would like.

**Insight 5: Listening to the Holy Spirit (any additional insight or experience to share) OR alternate theme:**

Lay people can (and should) take a more active role in the faith community and the community needs to create and communicate more opportunities for them to do so. Many of the issues identified as inhibitors to more effective synodality would be addressed through an increased focus on education and fellowship. Reviving ministries that help us overcome language and cultural barriers was captured as a valuable action.

**2) Final Question:** In what ways do you (pastor/leader in consultation with your team) see the Holy Spirit inviting the local Church here in the Archdiocese of Atlanta to grow in synodality?

Heightened and ongoing synodality as a dominant form of parish life is an objective for which we will develop practical steps and measurable goals. But we also feel invited to call for and enable the inter-parochial synodality that would help the Archdiocese serve as a more effective synodal model for its 102 parishes. When Music Ministry Leaders can talk to one another, when Faith Formation leaders have a forum to share what is working well in their parishes, when cross-parish collaboration is facilitated and rewarded, best practices will spread more quickly, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Archdiocese will be accelerated.