



Urban TRINITY

The Story of Catholic Philadelphia

Essential Questions

1. Women, though still not admitted to the priesthood or the church hierarchy, have nonetheless played leadership roles throughout the history of Catholic Philadelphia. Who were some of these heroines? Can any generalizations be made about the goals, approach, or style of female leadership among Catholic women?
2. Throughout the history of Catholic Philadelphia there have been conflicts between church leadership (e.g. archbishops, cardinals, and Vatican officials) and local parish priests, often aligned with laypeople. What examples of these conflicts are depicted in *Urban Trinity*? Which side usually triumphed in these battles? How do you explain this pattern?
3. Black Catholics form a small but important minority both among African Americans and within the Catholic Church of Philadelphia. What have been the greatest triumphs and tragedies for this group? Why do you think the filmmakers chose to open with B Richardson, an African American Catholic who makes two of the first five statements in *Urban Trinity*?
4. Irish Catholics were the largest immigrant group to Philadelphia in the nineteenth century. In spite of (or perhaps because of) their numbers, they faced significant challenges including prejudice from the Protestant majority, economic and political competition with African Americans, and dire poverty. What were some of the key milestones and turning points in the history of Irish Catholic Philadelphia? What enabled this community to ultimately survive and to thrive?
5. Catholic Philadelphia is referred to as “the cocoon” several times in *Urban Trinity*. Is this an apt term? At what points in its history was Philadelphia most cocoon-like? Is “cocoon” a term of inclusion or exclusion?
6. At the end of *Urban Trinity*, Monsignor Hugh Shields says, “We find ourselves experiencing cultures that we’re not accustomed to, we’re not used to, it calls the church to grow, to expand in powerful ways that are new.” Although Shields is describing the contemporary Catholic community in Philadelphia, what were other instances in which the church was required “to expand in powerful ways that are new”?



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Essential Questions – Possible Responses

This is not a traditional “Answer Key.” Rather, it is a list of relevant information from the film that will help you and your students discuss, analyze, and form your own opinions on the content of *Urban Trinity*.

I. Women, though still not admitted to the priesthood or the church hierarchy, have nonetheless played leadership roles throughout the history of Catholic Philadelphia. Who were some of these heroines? Can any generalizations be made about the goals, approach, or style of female leadership among Catholic women?

- **Catherine LeMaigre – before dying of Yellow Fever, helped to care for and establish supports for refugees from Saint Domingue in 1793**
- **Mary Connell — domestic servant who campaigned for lay control of the Church in the 1820s**
- **Sisters of Charity – helped victims of cholera; walked to and from work site to help Duffy’s workers in 1832**
- **Mary McLean – Catholic school teacher who refused to teach the King James Bible in the 1840s as tensions rose between Nativists and Irish Catholics**
- **Women religious – staffed the free Catholic schools set up in mid-1800s**
- **Katherine Drexel – a late nineteenth century heiress who chose to donate her vast fortune, become a nun, and found the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, an order that aided Native Americans and African Americans in particular (built St. Peter Claver); later sainted**
- **Maria Muccigrosso – known as “Mammarella,” at 80 she occupied the sanctuary of Our Lady of Good Counsel, an Italian church, when Cardinal Dougherty ordered the church closed in 1933**
- **Anna McGarry – during the 1930s -1950s, welcomed black newcomers to the Church of the Gesu in spite of priests who wanted it to remain a white church**

- **Cathy Rush & the “Mighty Macs”** – Rush coached her female basketball players at Immaculata College to numerous wins and several national championships during the 1970s

2. Throughout the history of Catholic Philadelphia there have been conflicts between church leadership (e.g. archbishops, cardinals, and Vatican officials) and local parish priests, often aligned with laypeople. What examples of these conflicts are depicted in *Urban Trinity*? Which side usually triumphed in these battles? How do you explain this pattern?

- **Conflict between Reverend William Hogan (supported by Mathew Carey) and Bishop Conwell erupted in 1820 over whether trustees or bishops had the right choose parish priests. Violence erupted, accusations that both Hogan and Conwell had violated their vows of chastity circulated, and it looked as though the Philadelphia church might even split. To end the conflict, Pope Pius VII sent Bishop Kenrick to enforce Rome-centered policy and ensure the bishop would have control.**
- **In the 1850s, Bishop James Wood wanted to close St. Mary Magdalen dePazzi, Monsignor Antonio Isoleri’s church because its Italian membership was not contributing funds to the archdiocese. Macaroni magnate Agostino Logomarcino joined Isoleri in his efforts to maintain Italian modes of worship and cultural cohesion. The Vatican ultimately supported Isoleri and the church remained open. The community thrived and built many of its own institutions.**
- **Archbishop Patrick Ryan removed Father Michal Barinski from leadership of St. Stanislaus, a Polish church in which Our Lady of Czestochowa, the Black Madonna, was revered. When the trustees refused to turn over the deed of the church to Ryan, a schism led to the founding of a Polish National Catholic Church.**
- **Cardinal Dougherty wanted to close Our Lady of Good Counsel, an Italian church, in 1933. In spite of a sit-in by “Mammarella” and the barricading of the priest, Father Gratta, within the church building, Dougherty ultimately had the church closed and later demolished.**

3. Black Catholics form a small but important minority both among African Americans and within the Catholic Church of Philadelphia. What have been the greatest triumphs and tragedies for this group? Why do you think the filmmakers chose to open with Barney Richardson, an African American Catholic who makes two of the first five statements in *Urban Trinity*?

- **In 1793, 800 enslaved Afro-Caribbean people arrived in Philadelphia along with French refugees from the slave revolt in Saint Domingue. Father Lawrence Graessl cared for both white and black refugees together which was a challenge to the social order.**
- **In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, African American Catholics were sometimes forced to sit in balconies or separate rooms in white churches.**
- **In 1892, Katherine Drexel (who devoted much of her work to helping Native Americans and African Americans) dedicated St. Peter Claver, a church at 12th & Lombard Streets that was a fully functioning parish serving the black community until 1985.**
- **During the mid 20th century, as thousands of African Americans migrated from the South in search of jobs, the priests of St. Theresa's and St. Charles Borromeo began to actively recruit black parishioners, many of whom were converts to Catholicism.**
- **Father Thomas Love and Father James Maguire tried to keep blacks out of the Church of the Gesu in North Philadelphia, a neighborhood to which many African Americans migrated during the 1930s and 1940s. Father Maguire assaulted a white parishioner who agreed to sell his house to a black family. White families resisted having black students attend Catholic schools. With the support of civil rights activist Anna McGarry and Cardinal Dougherty, Gesu eventually became a mixed race church.**
- **In 1993, the Church of the Gesu and fifteen other parishes were closed or merged as deindustrialization and white flight hit North Philadelphia.**

4. Irish Catholics were the largest immigrant group to Philadelphia in the nineteenth century. In spite of (or perhaps because of) their numbers, they faced significant challenges including prejudice from the Protestant majority, economic and political competition with African Americans, and dire poverty. What were some of the key milestones and turning points in the history of Irish Catholic Philadelphia? What enabled this community to ultimately survive and to thrive?

- **In the 1790s, Mathew Carey, an Irish Catholic printer, attempted to publish the first American version of the Catholic Douay Rheims bible, but his Protestant binders intentionally printed it out of order.**
- **Conflict between Reverend William Hogan (supported by Mathew Carey) and Bishop Conwell erupted in 1820 over**

- whether trustees or bishops had the right to choose parish priests. Violence erupted, accusations that both Hogan and Conwell had violated their vows of chastity circulated, and it looked as though the Philadelphia church might even split. To end the conflict, Pope Pius VII sent Bishop Kenrick to enforce Rome-centered policy and ensure the bishop would have control.
- In 1832, Philip Duffy recruited 57 Irish workers to help complete mile 59 of the Philadelphia-Columbia Railroad. Many became ill with cholera and were nursed by the Sisters of Charity. They were eventually massacred by Protestant vigilantes who feared the spread of disease.
 - As large numbers of Irish immigrated to Philadelphia, American Nativists feared their political power if they chose to vote uniformly. In May 1844, Nativist Protestant objection to the use of the Catholic bible by Irish Catholic students sparked an armed conflict at Kensington's Nanny Goat Market, an event that made a martyr of Nativist George Schiffler after he was shot by William McMullen. The riot that ensued resulted in 24 deaths, hundreds injured, and widespread destruction of property, including churches and convents. Ultimately, the Irish Catholics were given official blame for these events.
 - In July 1844, the "Bible Riots" continued in Southwark where armed Irish Catholics barricaded themselves in the St. Philip Neri Church. When a mob of Nativists forced their way in, an additional 50 people were wounded and 15 more people killed.
 - Desperate individuals and families fled the Irish potato famine that began in 1845. Rejected at a Philadelphia port, a group of 250 Irish passengers were left off in Southwark, a Nativist stronghold. In spite of prejudice against them, they arrived during an era in which Philadelphia was becoming "the workshop of the world," and jobs were plentiful. Bishop Neumann helped to found free parish schools in the 1850s, the era of the largest influx of Irish immigration to Philadelphia.
 - William McMullen (aka "The Squire"), an Irish Catholic fire fighter and veteran of the "Bible Riots," emerged as a ruthless and powerful community protector. Fearing the election of mayoral candidate Republican William Stokely who vowed to shut down the firehouses, McMullen and his followers fomented violence on election day in 1871 in an effort to intimidate newly enfranchised black men. In spite of the killing of five black men, including community leader Octavius Catto, McMullen's Democratic candidate was defeated.

- **During the twentieth century, the Kellys emerged as a stylish, wealthy, and politically powerful family seen as the pinnacle of Irish American achievement in Philadelphia.**

5. Catholic Philadelphia is referred to as “the cocoon” several times in *Urban Trinity*. Is this an apt term? At what points in its history was Philadelphia most cocoon-like? Is “cocoon” a term of inclusion or exclusion?

- **In the opening sequence**
 - **Commentator Chris Matthews looks back on growing up in 1950s Philadelphia and says, “We lived in a Catholic world growing up. I mean, all of our friends were Catholic. I just assumed that was the world we lived in: novenas and going to St. Stephen’s on Broad Street. The whole works, the big crowds at mass. Everybody went. Everybody dressed up in coat and tie.”**
 - **Kathy Cummings explains that during this mid-20th century era, Philadelphia had the largest Catholic grade school, the largest Catholic high school, and largest parochial school system in the nation.**
 - **John McGreevy mentions Catholic social services and hospitals and concludes, “you can build almost a whole city out of Catholic Philadelphia.”**
- **Following the Bible Riots of 1844, Irish Catholics decided to build their own institutions. As Jack Worrall describes it in the film, they did so “in the cocoon provided by the Catholic Church.”**
- **As an Irish immigrant in Moyamensing in the mid-19th century, Patrick Kelly is described by Fran Ryan as “living in the epicenter of Irish Philadelphia. You can hear the rosary being called out. The songs of Old Ireland. St. Paul’s is right there.” It is this community that “Squire” McMullen builds what Kate Oxx refers to as a “shield” in order to satisfy his “preternatural drive to protect his people.”**
- **Entrepreneur Agostino Lagomarsino funded the Societa as a community center for Italian Americans who also developed their own schools and churches. This desire to preserve Italian identity dismayed Bishop James Wood, but Jen Schaaf says, “The parish, the school, the convent, the community center....a place where all of their social as well as their spiritual needs could be met. It was a little cocoon for them; it was a safe place.”**

- During the late 1800s, Catholic immigrants like Stanislaw Glomwik (Stella) mixed with peoples of varied faiths who had come to Philadelphia from many other nations. In spite of the forces pushing people like Stella into the American melting pot, the Catholic Church sought to unify Catholics from across the globe inside a “protective fortress.” The massive Church of the Gesu and Roman Catholic High School were constructed as part of this fortress of Catholic community.
- Cardinal Dennis Dougherty came to Philadelphia in 1918 and found what Tom Rzeznik describes as “an archdiocese that is divided into various cocoons.” His mission was “to bring these groups together so that they could be a cohesive and coherent whole.” In order to meet this goal, Dougherty builds hospitals and universities as well as schools and churches. As Monsignor Michael Carroll puts it, “Dennis Cardinal Dougherty was God’s bricklayer.”
- In describing mid-20th century Catholic Philadelphia, Mary Ellen O’Donnell says, “It’s pretty clear-cut for the generation that lived in the cocoon. If you lived a certain way and followed certain rules and loved in certain ways that you could count on a good happy everlasting life.”
- Katherine Ott-Lovell, who grew up during the 1980s, recalls, “I lived on the 2900 block of Disston Street in Mayfair. We had 60 homes on our block, 30 on each side. And we would walk to St. Matt’s together, all the kids, we would leave at the same time. And there were 44 kids who would walk to school together the six blocks to St. Matt’s. You knew everybody’s business, you knew their triumphs. That was your family. That was your community.” Similarly, Maria McColgan says, “The first questions anybody asked you when you met them was, ‘what parish are you from?’ Epiphany, St. Monica’s St. Paul’s. That’s how we identified who we were and where we belonged.”
- In the closing sequences of the film, Putraka Pudiharto says, “They invite us—all the nations. St. Thomas Aquinas supports us very well. The Spanish community, the Indonesian, Vietnamese, Filipino community; they want to show the archdiocese of Philadelphia is welcoming everybody not only from the US itself but all immigrants of Catholic faith.” Similarly, Kimberly Ismaeil states, “I’ve been here since Kindergarten so it means a lot to me as a community and sense of family, even as a second home to me.”

6. At the end of *Urban Trinity*, Monsignor Hugh Shields says, “We find ourselves experiencing cultures that we’re not accustomed to, we’re not used to, it calls the church to grow, to expand in powerful ways that are new.” Although Shields is

describing the contemporary Catholic community in Philadelphia, what were other instances in which the church was required “to expand in powerful ways that are new”?

- **The migration of 3,000 French and Afro-Caribbean refugees from the Haitian slave revolt in 1793. Nearly all were Roman Catholic, thus the Catholic population in Philadelphia quickly doubled. During this time, Father Graessl heard confessions in French, German, Spanish, Latin, English, and possibly Irish reflecting the diversity of late 18th century Philadelphia. Sadly, he also had to bury their bodies together during the Yellow Fever epidemic.**
- **Irish Catholic immigration—before, during, and after the potato famine; seen as papists by the Protestant majority**
- **Italian immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought a more demonstrative style of worship as well as different political views and cultural traditions.**
- **In the late 19th century, Polish immigrants were devoted to Our Lady of Czestochowa, the Black Madonna.**
- **After initial resistance by pastors and many laypeople, Church of the Gesu in North Philadelphia became a mixed congregation of Irish Catholics, West Indian, Caribbean, and African American families during the mid-twentieth century.**
- **Today’s St. Thomas Aquinas has immigrants from Puerto Rico, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, Mexico and a variety of South and Central American nations.**