

# DignityUSA

## HOW TO HOST A HOUSE PARTY

In matters of raising support for a cause, experience has shown that prospects are more likely to give when someone they know asks them. This fact, coupled with the knowledge that DignityUSA members and friends enjoy gathering together for social events, makes hosting a house party one of the most successful ways to generate support for Dignity’s mission – both on the local and national levels.

House parties provide an opportunity for members and friends who support Dignity’s mission, but who are not part of one of our chapters’ faith communities, to strengthen their relationship with the organization and to contribute to its work.

This guide is meant to give advice on how to make hosting a house party easy and enjoyable. Additional assistance is available from the DignityUSA Fundraising Committee and the national office staff. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have by sending them to [info@dignityusa.org](mailto:info@dignityusa.org)

Your house party may find one-time donors to DignityUSA and local chapters, or make longtime friendships with the organization. It is ultimately an opportunity to talk about Dignity’s work and generate enthusiasm and support. By following this guide, your party will be a success.

### **What’s a House Party?**

A “house party” is just what the name implies – a gathering of friends, acquaintances, and supporters in your home or other venue. The party can be as elaborate or as simple as you prefer and should reflect the social norms of your chapter or social circles. The goal is to expose new people to Dignity, giving you an opportunity to personally invite them to join and/or support a project, as well as strengthen relationships with current members and supporters.

### **What’s the Purpose of a House Party?**

To gather both support and friends in order to advance DignityUSA’s mission to work for respect and justice for people of all sexual orientations, genders, and gender identities— especially gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons—in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy, and support. House parties are an important method to strengthen relationships with current members and supporters and to draw new members and supporters to DignityUSA. House parties are useful for broadening our base and educating gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons, as well as straight allies about DignityUSA’s advocacy, human and civil justice, spiritual, and social work nationally and locally.

## **House Party Goals**

Setting goals for your house party is an important step in deciding what you hope to achieve through this event and will help you to develop your task list, your agenda, and your 'ask' amount.

Here are some goals for you to consider:

1. How much money would you like to raise?
2. How many people do you want to attend?
3. What result do you want to achieve with your guests.
  - a. Raise awareness of a particular Dignity project or need.
  - b. Get a certain number of membership renewals or increased contributions.
  - c. Strengthen relationships (getting to know more about individual members and party attendees, learning more about their interests in Dignity and elsewhere, learning more about members' and attendees' families, jobs, etc.)
    - i. This is a very important part of your work at the house party. If this is done well, your guests will depart feeling valued as members, supporters, and donors and will likely get more people involved with the chapter and national organization as volunteers.

## **House Party Planning**

To make hosting a house party as simple as possible, DignityUSA has put together this "How-to-host a House Party Kit" and included are the following:

- A. Timetable & Checklist
- B. Developing your invitation list
- C. Creating your invitation with sample invitation
- D. Follow up on your Invitation
- E. Suggested agenda
- F. Refreshment ideas
- G. Pre-Event Questionnaire

## A. TIMETABLE & CHECKLIST

- 6 weeks before the event \_\_\_\_\_ Identify key friends and fellow members and invite them to join you in hosting this event. These individuals will form the 'Host Committee' and will be your corps of volunteers.
- 4 weeks before the event \_\_\_\_\_ Set the date and inform your local chapter and the national office to get their approval.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Draw up your invitation list (the rule of thumb is you need to send 120 invitations to have 40 attend – or a 3:1 ratio).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Draft your invitation and prepare it for mailing.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Post event information on your chapter's website.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Post event information on your chapter and personal Facebook and other social networking pages.
- 3 weeks before the event \_\_\_\_\_ Mail out invitations (you can create and mail your own hard copy or use an electronic invitation service such as e-vite. ([www.evite.com](http://www.evite.com)))
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make a list of 'night-of-party' duties and divide them among your host committee and other volunteers. Examples of duties might include: someone to serve as a “door person” – they'll help buzz people in, answer the door, take coats, sign people in, collect checks, help with last-minute details.
- 2 weeks before the event \_\_\_\_\_ Call/email everyone who has not RSVP'd; ask if they're coming.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Keep a list of who is coming and use this as a check-in list the night of the party.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Plan out your menu.
- 1 week before the event \_\_\_\_\_ Decide who will do the introduction/Prepare and practice your introduction.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Finish any remaining calls to get RSVP's.
- The week of the event \_\_\_\_\_ Remind your volunteers of the time they need to arrive to prepare for the party.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Purchase all supplies needed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Plan and make your refreshments.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Confirm date and time with any special guests, especially any speakers.

## B. CREATING YOUR INVITATION LIST

How can you make sure your house party will be well attended? In our experience, it's not complicated. Your best chance for a successful attendance is to follow these steps:

- a. Determine a clear reason for the event (what is it you hope to do or to support with these contributions);
- b. Determine your message and whether or not you will have a special guest speaker;
- c. Determine a logical guest list – what groups of people are most likely to be interested in supporting Dignity or care that this is important to you;
- d. Send out three times as many invitations as your expected attendance;
- e. Ten days before the event, follow up with phone calls or e-mails to secure a reply.

Ideas for your invitation list:

1. **Your local membership:** Invite not only active, inactive, and past members of your chapter, but also anyone in your geographical area. This will be your closest circle of interest.  
  
From this base, you and your host committee should think through all social circles for invitation possibilities. Are people in these groups interested in the work Dignity performs? Are they interested because you are involved?  
  
You will want to review these prospects and send invitations to those you think would be most likely to respond.
2. **Family:** Consider including your parents, sisters, brothers, kids, aunts, uncles, and cousins.
3. **Friends:** And don't forget friends of your spouse/lover/life partner/boyfriend/girlfriend.
4. **Social acquaintances:** Friends you only see on occasion. Friends, professors, or teachers from college/school. Friends from past employments, military service, community center and/or from the charity, hotline, or community group where you volunteer or volunteered.
5. **Neighbors:** Next door, upstairs, downstairs, down the hall, the whole building! People on the block that you always run into when you go jogging, walk the dog, or go shopping. Your co-op board. Your homeowners or tenants association. Your landlord. Your tenants. Your property management team. Your babysitter. Your child care collective. Your car pool. The parents of your children's friends.
6. **From Religious Circles:** Other Catholic activists. Your local clergyperson, minister, priest, rabbi, or imam. Church board members and activists. Church event and religious service regular attendees. Friends who may be not-so-regular attendees. The people you always share high holidays with.
7. **From your Labor Union:** Union leaders. Activists. Your steward. Your business agent. Other union staff. Your co-workers there.
8. **From work or community work:** Current and former co-workers, supervisors, and managers. Current and former business partners, associates, and employees. Present and former clients. Colleagues from community or charity work.

9. **Members of:** Your block- or neighborhood-association. Your political club. Your community group. Your food co-op. Your local peace or environmental group. The PTA. Your local school board. Your community board.
10. **People you've met while recreating:** Members of your bowling league. Volleyball team. Cooking group. Pick-up basketball folks. The bridge club. Your poker buddies. Night classes. Lamaze class. Aerobics class. At the gym. Your house mates from ski weekends. From beach or camping trips. From traveling together. People you sing with. Choir. Jamming. Go caroling with. People you shop with. Garden with. Vacation with.
11. **Professionals you know personally:** Your lawyer, dentist, doctor, pharmacist, broker, butcher, dry cleaner, and baker.
12. **Pull out lists you've made in the past:** The invitation list to your last party. Your Christmas card list. The program from your last reunion. Your Rolodex at work and at home. Your personal phone book.
13. **Interesting people you know who support social change:** Finally, think about interesting people you've met, but may not know well, who are active in their communities – WHO DO YOU KNOW: In geographical or geopolitical communities. In various ethnic, cultural, and immigrant communities. The women's movement. The LGBT community. Teachers. Seniors and retirees. College and high school students. The disabled community. Anyone who's made the observation that everyone deserves civil rights.

After all this, if you still don't have enough people to invite, what do you do? Ask a friend to cohost the party with you – they invite half the people, you invite half the people, and together you'll have a good invitation list.

## C. CREATING YOUR INVITATION

Below are some general tips for creating an invitation. For a sample of an invitation see the following page. Feel free to use it as is, or change it as you see fit.

Your invitation can be sent a number of ways, but we recommend creating either a simple party-type invitation or using an electronic service such as E-vite.

Your invitation should include the following:

1. The Dignity Logo (either national or local)
2. Who is extending the invitation
  - a. Names of yourself and host committee
3. What the party is for
  - a. To support the work of DignityUSA or to introduce a new program from Dignity, etc
  - b. The name of a special guest who will be speaking
4. What is happening at the party
  - a. Time the party starts and what time it ends, time any program begins
    - i. Ex: 5:30 – 7: 30 PM, Special Guest Speaker, 6:30 PM
  - b. What the guests can expect
    - i. Ex: cocktails/hors d'oeuvres, dinner, drinks
5. RSVP information
  - a. When a reply is expected
  - b. How to reply
    - i. Include a reply card
    - ii. Include a phone number or email address
  - c. With the reply, try to collect as much information as you can:
    - i. Name, address, city, state, zip, phone, email are all key.

SAMPLE INVITATION

DignityUSA invites you to  
A Celebration of Faith and Service  
A fundraising event to support Dignity's advocacy work in Your Town and across the nation.

Saturday, September 18, 2010  
Special Guest Speaker  
DignityUSA Executive Director Marianne Duddy-Burke  
5:30 – 7:30 PM  
Cocktails and Hors D'oeuvres  
Special Program 6:30 PM

1234 Main Street  
Your Town

RSVP by September 15 to  
[info@dignityusa.org](mailto:info@dignityusa.org)  
or call 383-333-3333

List hosts committee here

DignityUSA works for respect and justice for people of all sexual orientations, genders, and gender identities – especially gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons – in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy, and support.

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You may include a specific or suggested donation on the invitation or otherwise make clear guests will be asked to make a contribution. You never want to invite people to a party without their knowing that they will be asked for something in return.

## **D. FOLLOW-UP TO YOUR INVITATION**

Ten days before your house party, please call/email everyone on your invitation list who has not RSVP'd, to confirm his or her attendance or to secure a contribution. Only a small number of people you invite will RSVP before they get a phone call. Many more will come if you give them a call. It is okay to leave a message if you cannot reach someone in person.

We can guarantee from long experience: if you mail 120 invitations, and follow up with calls to everyone, you will have 40 people in your living room to hear about Dignity. Here's a suggested script for the calls:

“Hi, this is (your name). I mailed you an invitation to my fund raiser for Dignity. The event is at my home on (date of event). I hope you can join us – will you be able to come?”

(If they're coming) “Great, I'll see you then.”

(If they're not sure) “I hope you can come – Dignity is a critical link in our fight to end discrimination, and to gain equality and justice. I think you'll be impressed by the strides both in the Church and in society we've made because of Dignity and its work.”

(If they can't come) “I'm sorry you can't come – Dignity is doing really important work on behalf of our community. I hope you'll write a check – if you send it to me, I'll forward it to Dignity.”

## **E. SUGGESTED AGENDA**

House parties are most successful when scheduled for a two-hour slot. Commonly chosen times include weekday nights from 6 to 8, or from 8 to 10 – or Sunday afternoons from 12 to 2, 2 to 4, or 4 to 6.

The first hour is for the arrival of guests and conversation. As guests arrive, they sign in. This way, we'll be sure to have his or her name and current address, so we can get everyone a prompt thank-you note or appropriate follow-up.

At the beginning of the second hour, the program begins. It has two or three parts:

1. Introduction of Speaker: (3-5 minutes) usually done by the host.
2. Speaker's remarks: (10 minutes) and questions and answers (15-20 minutes).
3. The Pitch: (5 minutes) by a guest or host – the “pitch” asks people to get involved and tells them how they can help.
4. Get the Check: After the pitch, the formal program is over and guests go back to mingling. However, collecting checks is, of course, of great importance. After the pitch, you should distribute volunteer cards and donor cards, and your guests will write their checks. Please make sure that everyone is asked for a check before they leave.

## **F. REFRESHMENT IDEAS**

Refreshments at your house party can be as plain or fancy, as you wish. Below are some suggestions:

### Easy and inexpensive refreshments

There are many types of food and drink that are easy on you, easy on your budget, and just right for a house party. Remember, people don't come for the food – they come because they're interested in Dignity, and they respect the fact that you've gotten involved. Other hosts have had successful house parties and served on of the following menus:

1. Potluck
2. Cheese and crackers, and wine and soda
3. Coffee and cake
4. Vegetables and dip, guacamole and chips, fresh fruit, and soda and beer
5. Sweet rolls, tea, milk, and coffee
6. Tea and cookies

If you prepare the refreshments yourself, you can budget \$5 or more per person and offer any of the above menus. Coffee and cake can cost just fifty cents a person. The bottom line is: you don't have to spend a lot of money on refreshments to have a house party that will really help. Serve whatever refreshments you like, and they'll be fine.

### Catered Food

If you plan to use a caterer and serve more elaborate fair, plan on higher expenses and try to get someone to underwrite those expenses. **DO NOT GO OVERBOARD!** It is very easy for this expense to get out of control, so plan very modestly and tightly. Be sure to include gratuity in your food budget and be sure to use your chapter's sales tax exemption to avoid paying sales tax on any of your purchases.

## G. PRE-EVENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Use this questionnaire as a guide to make sure you've thought through all aspects of your event.

Name of event: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State of event: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Prepared: \_\_\_\_\_

Prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Have you conducted fundraising events in the past?     Yes     No

2. Describe the event:

Reception     Meal     Cocktails     Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Name of main sponsor:

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Has a host committee been established?     Yes     No

If yes, please provide us with a list of host committee members:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_    Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_    Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_    Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

If no, when will the host committee be established?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What has each host committee member pledged? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Have you/host committee secured local underwriters?     Yes     No

If yes, please identify and indicate in what form their contributions will be, i.e. financial or in-kind: \_\_\_\_\_

If no, do you anticipate having local underwriters?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Who will be invited to the event? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Will there be honored or special guests?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No  
 If yes, please identify: \_\_\_\_\_  
 If yes, will they require transportation/accommodations?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No  
 If yes, identify party responsible for transportation/accommodations costs:  
 Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Will Dignity \_\_\_ Board or \_\_\_ Staff members be present?  
 If yes, identify party responsible for transportation/accommodation costs:  
 Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Please identify what mailing lists, other than Dignity's will be used?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
10. Will each member of the host committee person provide a list of individual's invited?  
 \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No  
 Date lists due: \_\_\_\_\_
11. Date and time of event: \_\_\_\_\_
12. Location of event:  
 \_\_\_ Home    \_\_\_ Restaurant    \_\_\_ Public Space    \_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 If it is a public space, is a deposit required?    \_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_ No  
 If yes, \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Is the deposit \_\_\_ refundable or \_\_\_ nonrefundable?  
 Party responsible for deposit:  
 Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_
13. Will the event be held indoors or outdoors, and is there a plan for inclement weather?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
14. Estimated attendance: \_\_\_\_\_
15. Admission to be charged/donation requested: \_\_\_\_\_
16. Estimated gross receipts: \_\_\_\_\_

17. Describe refreshments planned:  
 \_\_\_ Hors d'oeuvres \_\_\_ Buffet \_\_\_ Sit-Down \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
18. Will the event be catered?  
 If yes, name of caterer: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone/Fax: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Will it be donated by the caterer or underwritten by another?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Party responsible for catering charges: \_\_\_\_\_  
 If no, who will provide food? \_\_\_\_\_
19. Will there be a bar? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No  
 Type of bar: \_\_\_ Cash \_\_\_ Open  
 If alcohol is to be sold, list estimated receipts: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Type of alcohol to be served: \_\_\_ Beer \_\_\_ Wine \_\_\_ Liquor  
 Will the bar need to be staffed? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No  
 Please identify who will staff the bar: \_\_\_ Volunteers \_\_\_ Paid Staff  
 Party responsible for bar bill: \_\_\_\_\_
20. Who is responsible for designing the invitations? \_\_\_ Staff \_\_\_ Host  
 If staff, invitation must be reviewed and approved by host:  
 Date reviewed by host: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date approved by host: \_\_\_\_\_  
 If host, invitation must be reviewed and approved by staff:  
 Date reviewed by staff: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date approved by staff: \_\_\_\_\_
21. Number of invitations to be printed: \_\_\_\_\_
22. Number of invitations to be mailed by staff: \_\_\_\_\_
23. Number of invitations to be mailed by host: \_\_\_\_\_
24. Date invitations to be mailed: \_\_\_\_\_
25. Date event Tally and Checklist sheets were mailed: \_\_\_\_\_
26. Event review schedule: \_\_\_\_\_
27. Major donors/community leaders who need to be called by the executive director prior to the event: \_\_\_\_\_

28. Members of the press who need to be called to the event:

\_\_\_\_\_

29. Date for press release/news advisory regarding event: \_\_\_\_\_

30. Is the event a joint effort with any other group?     Yes     No

If yes, what group: \_\_\_\_\_

31. Is there a clear understanding of how any revenues and expenses will be split?

Yes     No

If yes, then how: \_\_\_\_\_

## HOW TO RAISE FUNDS

In our culture, money is a very taboo subject. Many of us were raised to believe that it is impolite to discuss salaries or how much we paid for things. We love the phrase “money doesn't buy happiness”.

But, the truth is money does matter. If we want to change things within our society through the organizations we support, we have to learn to overcome our fears about discussing money.

Here are some essential truths and general tips about asking for money:

1. *Success is asking*: you are still the same person, with the same worth and the same objective whether the person says “yes” or “no”.
2. *You are not the issue*: Don't take it personally. People say “no” for a lot of reasons – most of which have nothing to do with you.
3. *“No” is okay*: Have you ever had someone solicit you who were so obviously distraught that you feared they might faint if you didn't give them the answer they wanted? That puts too much pressure on the donor. When you accept the fact that “no” is okay, you and the donor can relax.
4. *Let DignityUSA talk*: You are not asking the donor to give you money to buy something for you – you are asking for Dignity. Be proud of that and talk about what the money will accomplish.
5. *This is not begging*: Begging is asking for something in return for nothing. Raising money for DignityUSA supports an important mission, which provides a lot in return for their money.
6. *Money isn't so special*: The work DignityUSA does *is* special.
7. *Be positive*: Assume that the person will join, renew or contribute. That confidence will come through in your voice and demeanor. Also, if you deliver your message enthusiastically, the person is more likely to agree to your request.
8. *When an objection is raised*, respond to it thoughtfully, and then request for a donation. Don't assume it means they won't join, renew or contribute.
9. *Don't over talk*: If you are nervous, you will have a tendency to forget to stop talking. Ask for the contribution and then be quiet, otherwise they won't have a chance to say “yes”. Don't be afraid of silence – it gives the person time to consider what you've just asked them to do.
10. *Ask again*: If the person is hesitating, restate the importance of Dignity's work and remind them that their support is critical. Then ask again.
11. *Adjust your pace of talking to match that of the donor's*: For example, speak more slowly for older donors or speed up if the person is obviously impatient. Talking too fast can make you sound like an aluminum siding salesman, and this is not the “trust-inspiring” image you wish to convey.
12. *Be persistent but tactful*: Some fundraisers estimate that 25% of their gifts come from making one more attempt to ask for the gift.
13. Take a moment to *send a personal note* regardless of whether the person has agreed to join, renew or contribute. By sending a note, especially after the person says “no”, leaves the door open for future contact and a future “ask”.

14. Make sure your guests all receive a thank you note from the host committee.
15. In order for your guests to receive a thank you and tax contribution letter from either your local chapter or from DignityUSA, their gift must be accompanied by their name and address information.

## **CONCLUSION**

We hope this guide will be of great assistance in making your event a success. Again, please contact the DignityUSA office by email [info@dignityusa.org](mailto:info@dignityusa.org) or by voice 800-877-8797 or 202-861-0017 with any questions you may have.

Good luck with your event and thank you for your support and work on behalf of DignityUSA.