

*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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## So, Now What?

By Mark Matson, President, DignityUSA

Our last convention theme was “Together We Will Reach the Promised Land.” The convention marked and celebrated DignityUSA’s 40th anniversary of ministry and advocacy for GLBT Catholics. The metaphor of a Promised Land brought to mind the wandering of the Israelites in the desert for 40 years. You may recall that in my convention address I talked about what may have happened when they emerged from the desert. I imagined Moses saying to God, “So, now what?”



Mark Matson

I recalled the journey my own great grandparents made from Sweden to Colorado via Minnesota. I imagined them moving through the high grasses of The Great Plains for what must have seemed an eternity until one day they came up over a rise in the land to see the Rockies standing in front of them. They must have said something like “So, now what?”

My relatives decided the mountains were too formidable to go over and they were travel weary. So they settled in Denver, which became a city because so many people ended their westward journey at the base of the Rockies. But not all. As we all know, many others tackled the challenge and pushed onward. But they were forced to adapt to a very different topography and climate. The behaviors that brought them successfully across the ocean and the plains would not work through a mountainous landscape where the climate changed dramatically with every additional 1,000 feet in elevation.

The “promised land” and “tackling the mountains” metaphors are guiding the current leadership of DignityUSA. It is clear to us that many of the driving forces that built and sustained this organization in our past will not take us into our future. For example, many of us were inspired by events of our generation, most notably Vatican II and the American civil rights movement. These are not events that have shaped younger generations. While they were powerful for many, they are not for young Catholics today.

We know our chapters for the most part are shrinking and aging. Your Board has fashioned a strategic plan that tries to address this fundamental problem by reaching out to three demographics that are very under-represented within DignityUSA: women, youth, and Latino Catholics. This is much easier said than done. I already see divides among us over the question of the role of women in priestly ministries—a core issue to many women who would be sympathetic to our mission. They can relate to our experience of being relegated to the fringes by the power structures of the Church for something we have no control over—our sexuality and gender identity. It seems that efforts to enlarge the circle to welcome these women threatens to push others away who are not ready for anything other than a validly and licitly ordained presider at the altar—which means male. So I come back to that fundamental question “So, now what?”

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*So, Now What?*

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In a similar vein, I have heard so many times something similar to the comment from young people, “Why would I want to join a group of people who are mourning the loss of something I can’t relate to (Vatican II reforms) and complaining about what the Church isn’t rather than what it can be?”

My fear is that the vast majority of us are not ready to make the changes necessary to go up and over these new mountains. Travel-weary, we want to settle at the base of the mountains and make the best of what we have become comfortable with. Ironic for a bunch of discontent trouble-makers, don’t you think? But also understandable.

Folks, as your President, here is my conviction. We either change or we die. K-Mart has failed to adapt to changing retailing trends. Their stores look much like they did 20-30 years ago. They are losing market share and closing stores rather than opening them. That is our destiny if we do not evolve. But how? That is what your leadership is trying to figure out.

- DignityUSA is in the best financial condition we have been for as long as anyone can remember, thanks to the generosity of people who believe in the organization and the need for its continuity, as well as faithful departed in loving memory who have made bequests to DignityUSA as living memorials in their wills.

- We have a strong team of leaders among the Board members and operations staff.
- Membership is growing, but mostly through people unaffiliated with chapters.
- There are many signs that the Spirit still has work for us to do. But what is it?

It is an exciting time to lead DignityUSA. I have no indication that my personal convictions about where we need to go are off-base because your Board is unified.

You can be a part of the team that is grappling with fundamental questions, such as what does it mean to be “Roman Catholic.” If you think we are heading in the wrong direction – get involved. If you think we are heading in the right direction and you want to help us get over the mountains – get involved.

We are currently seeking new talent as candidates to run for positions on our National Board of Directors in upcoming elections. (See page 5.)

In little more than a year, the current Executive Committee (officers) will likely be stepping down. I know I will. I took on this job reluctantly. I did not seek it. It sought me. But I said “yes” to the Spirit’s call and I am happy to report I have found this role to be quite rewarding. If you know of people who would make a good President, Vice President, Secretary, or Treasurer, ask them to consider serving. Contact me by e-mail at [President@dignityusa.org](mailto:President@dignityusa.org) and I will talk with them. It is not too soon. We must put a slate of candidates together in less than a year.

In the meantime, keep us in your prayers and keep communicating to help us figure out the answer to the vexing question “So, now what?”



## DignityUSA Board of Directors to Meet in Philadelphia April 16-18

DignityUSA's Board of Directors will meet at the Radisson Plaza-Warwick Hotel, 220 South 17th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103, (215) 735-6000, Friday through Sunday, April 16-18, 2010.

We encourage DignityUSA members to see the board in action. You need not spend the entire weekend with us.

The board meets for about 3 hours Friday night. Work resumes by 9 a.m. on Saturday and goes through the day until about 6 p.m. Sunday, the Board wraps up its work in a 3-hour session ending at 12 noon.

DignityUSA members wishing to see the agenda, can contact Lewis Tanner ([secretary@dignityusa.org](mailto:secretary@dignityusa.org)).

**Happy Anniversary  
& Congratulations to:**

**Cincinnati (OH) - 37 years**



## Catholics for Equality Organizational Meeting

By Mark Matson, President, DignityUSA

DignityUSA was requested to participate in a seminal and hastily organized gathering of Catholic LGBT advocates in Washington, DC on January 30 and 31, 2010. I represented DignityUSA in lieu of Executive Director Marianne Duddy-Burke, who was unable to clear her calendar on short notice. I was joined by Board members Mark Clark and Tom Yates, both of Dignity/Washington. Ray Panas, President of Dignity/Washington was also present.

The meeting was convened by Phil Attey, a Washington attorney, and Rev. Dr. Joe Palacios, a Jesuit priest from Los Angeles currently on the faculty at Georgetown University. The purpose of the meeting was to address the increasing role of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and state Bishops' conferences on LGBT political issues, and to coordinate efforts to shift Catholic public opinion and voter behaviors.

We joined the following individuals and organizations.

- **Rev. Anthony Adams** – Bilerico.com
- **Joanna Blotner** – Human Rights Campaign
- **Chuck Colbert** – Freelance journalist and frequent contributor to *National Catholic Reporter*
- **Frank DeBernardo** – New Ways Ministry
- **Rev. Geoffrey Farrow** – Los Angeles, CA (Geoff presented the homily at DignityUSA's Convention 2009 liturgy.)
- **Sr. Jeannine Gramick, SL** – National Coalition of American Nuns
- **Sharon Groves** – Human Rights Campaign
- **Charles Martel** – Catholics for Marriage Equality in Massachusetts
- **Peter Montgomery** – People for the American Way
- **Matthew Myers** – New Ways Ministry
- **Shiva Subbaraman** – Georgetown LGBTQ Resource Center
- **Anne Underwood** – Catholics for Marriage Equality in Maine

DignityUSA was warmly welcomed by the organizers as a thought leader and long-time advocate for LGBT Catholics. We significantly influenced the conversations that weekend. The group resolved to create a new educational and political organization to educate and mobilize fair-minded Catholic voters to advance LGBT equality issues at the federal, state, and local levels. The new group will address both immediate political concerns and long term social-cultural change through public awareness campaigns and grassroots mobilization efforts. The new organization is called Catholics for Equality. It will build on the talents and resources of already existing LGBT political and progressive Catholic organizations and coordinate strategies and resources in our united campaign. I see it as a Catholic equivalent to HRC (Human Rights Campaign). If the organizers' aspirations are well grounded in the skills and contacts they described, I see this organization evolving into a very significant ally in DignityUSA's mission to "amplify the voice" of LGBT Catholics, their families, and friends. They are experienced political organizers with access to "deep pockets", and are being actively supported by HRC. Catholics for Equality will focus on influencing legislation and the behavior of Catholic voters in a way that DignityUSA cannot with our 501(c)(3) designation. It will address issues affecting the LGBT community, including discrimination in employment, military service, housing and public accommodations, and legal recognition of family – civil marriage, adoption & custody, immigration, insurance, hospital visitation, etc.

The group decided to create an interim development board that will oversee work leading to the organization's official launch on Ascension Thursday – May 13, 2010. The Catholics for Equality Development Board was assigned the following tasks:

*Continued on page 4*

## 2009 Tax Statements

End of year tax statements for 2009 were sent to donors of \$250 or more at the end of January 2009.

People who have not received them by mid-February 2010 should contact Peggy Burns, Operations Manager at [info@dignityusa.org](mailto:info@dignityusa.org).

## Announcement

Jenn Gibson is currently working on a new book that tells the story of same-sex couples at all stages of the relationship process. The book is in its early stages.

Jenn is looking for couples to interview. If you are interested in participating or desire further information, please contact [happythebook@gmail.com](mailto:happythebook@gmail.com).

Website:

<http://www.happythebook.com>

Facebook:

<http://tiny.cc/HappyTheBook>

### *Catholics for Equality Organizational Meeting* *Continued from page 3*

1. Develop a strategic plan for the organization.
2. Incorporate Catholics for Equality as a 501(c)(4) organization.
3. Develop a communications strategy and program to orchestrate the organizational launch which will involve institutional branding and the creating of both online and print materials.
4. Identify and solicit initial funding.
5. Develop an outreach strategy for bringing in community including influential theologians.

DignityUSA will hold two seats on the board, represented by Marianne Duddy-Burke and myself. We will be working to ensure the group evolves in a fashion that complements our own mission and vision, rather than competes with it. We will keep you posted on developments.

Peter Montgomery, Senior Fellow at People for the American Way, facilitated the weekend discussion. Cathy Renna, Media Relations Director, Renna Communications, advised the meeting attendees on communications strategy. She spoke very highly of the work by DignityUSA's Executive Director, Marianne Duddy-Burke—referencing lobbying in Massachusetts related to the sexual abuse scandal, and later at a Bishops' National Conference meeting in Dallas featured in *USA Today*.



: (L to R): Mark Clark, DignityUSA Director, listens to Cathy Renna (Renna Communications), and Peter Montgomery (People for the American Way)



## IMPORTANT Announcement

We respectfully request that our DignityUSA members confirm or update their e-mail and USPS mailing addresses for use in the forthcoming 2010 elections to our National Board of Directors mentioned in the article "DignityUSA Board Nominations Now Open" adjacent to this announcement.

Please provide your name(s), current mailing address, old mailing address (if different), chapter affiliation (if any), and e-mail address(es) (if any).

If possible, please send the information in an e-mail message to [info@dignityusa.org](mailto:info@dignityusa.org) with a header or subject: "Member Registration." If the information is not sent from **your** e-mail address, please state that fact. If electronic delivery is not possible, please send your information to Peggy-Burns, Operations Manager, P.O. Box 376, Medford, MA 02155-0004.

For your privacy and security, information provided is treated as confidential for use by DignityUSA **ONLY** and is not shared with other individuals or organizations.

Please respond as soon as possible, but **no later than May 1, 2010**.

Special note to Dignity chapter leadership. Please ensure that this announcement is delivered to your chapter members without e-mail access or e-mail addresses.

Thanks to all for your attention, assistance, and cooperation.

## DignityUSA Board Nominations Now Open

Nominations are open for four (4) Directors-at-Large for a period of two years—October 1, 2010 to September 30, 2012.

Nominees for the Board of Directors "...must be current Regular Members of DignityUSA," i.e., "...any individual who pays any required Dues for Regular Membership and endorses the Statement of Position and Purpose of DignityUSA."

Nominations may be submitted by nominee(s) or a third party using the MS Word Nomination Form for Board of Directors found on DignityUSA's website at [http://www.dignityusa.org/httpdocs/docs/DUSA\\_Nom10.doc](http://www.dignityusa.org/httpdocs/docs/DUSA_Nom10.doc).

Completed forms should be sent to DignityUSA Nominations Committee, P.O. Box 376, Medford, MA 02155-0004, or by Fax to 781-397-0584, or online to [nominations10@dignityusa.org](mailto:nominations10@dignityusa.org). Nominations must be submitted **no later than April 15, 2010**.

Nominees are invited to submit digitized photos to be used in conjunction with election information and election ballots sent to the membership. Please submit the photos electronically to the Nominations Committee [nominations10@dignityusa.org](mailto:nominations10@dignityusa.org) **no later than April 15, 2010**.

For information on the responsibilities of the Board of Directors, commitment, skills needed, and becoming a candidate, please see "Serving on the DignityUSA Board," at <http://www.dignityusa.org/serving-on-board>.

Questions or comments concerning Nominations 2010 should be directed to [nominations10@dignityusa.org](mailto:nominations10@dignityusa.org), or to Operations Manager Peggy Burns at 800-877-8797

Election ballots will be sent electronically to those who have provided us with an e-mail address; otherwise, those without e-mail addresses will have ballots mailed via USPS on or about May 20, 2010, to the address on our DignityUSA membership records. Please see the Important Announcement adjacent to this article.



May you have:  
A world of wishes at your command,  
God and angels close to hand,  
Friends and family their love impart,  
and Irish blessings in your heart!

## CHAPTER & OTHER NEWS

### Executive Director Participates in Creating Change 2010 Conference

Marianne Duddy-Burke, Executive Director DignityUSA, represented the organization and participated in the National Gay/Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) Creating Change Conference in Dallas, TX February 3-7, 2010.

Marianne presented a session on “Mobilizing Pro-LGBT Catholics on Civil Rights Initiatives.” She was also part of a meeting sponsored by the Arcus Foundation which brought together about 20 denominations to assess the status of the work of faith-based LGBT groups in the LGBT justice movement.

Marianne also met with members and leaders of Dignity/Dallas.



Marianne Duddy-Burke receives check from Joseph Bordelon (Dignity/Dallas Vice President)

### Dignity/Dallas Staffs Information Table at NGLTF Creating Change Conference and Helps Underwrite Costs

Members of Dignity/Dallas helped staff DignityUSA's information table during NGLTF's Creating Change Conference, February 3-7, 2010, in Dallas. The chapter donated a check to Executive Director Marianne Duddy-Burke to help offset costs associated with the info table and materials.



(L to R) Victor Kralisz (Dignity/Dallas Past President) with partner and member Russell Windle and fairly new member Grady Bracknell



(L to R) Jim Davis (Dignity/Dallas Secretary) and Marianne Duddy-Burke (DignityUSA Executive Director)

### Dignity/Boston 2009 Second Collections

Dignity/Boston, reporting on its monthly 2009 second collections, thanked its membership for its generous contributions. Over \$4,900 was donated to local charities and non-profit groups. Additionally, over \$2,000 was raised to benefit the chapter's DignityUSA Convention scholarship fund.

## Why “Should” You Forgive?

From *The Examined Life*

By Tom Moon, MFT (Marriage and Family Therapist)

Reprinted with author’s permission.

Q: I’ve hated my father all my life and I can’t let go of it. He was a violent, abusive man who beat, bullied and terrorized the whole family. He figured out I was gay years before I did, and he thought it was funny to call me “the faggot,” even in front of strangers in public. I finally left home twelve years ago and have never been back. I’ve waited for years for him to contact me and offer some apology, but I’m finally realizing that it’s never going to happen because it’s just not in his character. A big part of what has kept me going all this time is my spiritual life, and these values teach me that my duty is to forgive. I do accept my responsibility to forgive, and I understand that both my parents really did the best they could, given their own backgrounds. But I can’t seem to let go of the anger and bitterness. How do I get myself to forgive?



Tom Moon,  
MFT

A: Is forgiveness your “duty?” So many survivors of childhood abuse seem to believe that the abuse confers on them an obligation to forgive those who hurt them. I don’t personally see how victims can have any obligations toward their perpetrators, beyond that of not succumbing to the temptations of destructive vengefulness. I also believe that there is something psychologically unrealistic about the concept of forgiveness as a duty, because genuine forgiveness isn’t just an act of the will; it’s a movement of the heart. You can’t really forgive just because your mind tells you you’re supposed to. When it comes it seems to come on its own, when the heart is ready.

And how do you know that your parents “did the best they could?” Do you always do the best you can? I know I don’t. I can look back on many times in my life when I’ve behaved badly toward others. I’m sure you also can remember occasions when you didn’t live up to your moral standards, and my guess is that you hold yourself morally accountable for what you did, or failed to do. If that’s true of you, isn’t it true for your parents, too? I say this because I don’t believe that you can genuinely forgive abuse until you first face clearly, and without equivocation, that wrongs were committed. Your father wounded you deeply. You didn’t deserve it, and there is no justification or possible excuse for it. Period, end of story.

Having said that, I do sympathize with your desire not to nurse a grudge for the rest of your life, because that’s a very painful way to live. The fact that you want to be free of this suffering is a sign of the love you hold for yourself. Unfortunately, what you’re up against now is the reality that you can’t relieve your own suffering by just deciding that you “ought” to forgive and then somehow turn off the anger like a faucet. When you try to do that you make your pain worse, because you just wind up using the idea of forgiveness as a tool of self-reproach. That’s not surprising: many survivors of child abuse are pretty hard on themselves.

Which brings me to this suggestion: if you want to forgive, focus on yourself first. Stop making yourself wrong for being in pain. If you’re telling yourself that you should be a “bigger” person or “more mature,” or that you should be over it by now, you’re treating yourself with a version of the same contempt that your father showed you. But you’re not made of stone. You are, like everyone else, a sensitive and vulnerable human being who can be deeply hurt by others. Accept and forgive yourself for that. If you find forgiving yourself a tall order at this point, don’t make yourself wrong for that, either. The path of healing from childhood abuse is usually a long one, and requires a lot of patience and compassion toward oneself. It often also requires a lot of support from professionals and friends to work through the hurt, fear, shame, and rage that this kind of abuse engenders.

One of the things that makes me ultimately optimistic about human nature is the fact that when abuse survivors do their inner work thoroughly, when they befriend themselves and come to deep loyalty to their own well-being, then a warm compassion and genuine forgiveness for the perpetrators often flowers all by itself. But this opening of the heart can’t be forced. When we try to force ourselves to forgive as a moral imperative we just wind up making ourselves feel guilty, and the “forgiveness” we offer reeks of the hypocritical sanctimoniousness of those who “love the sinner and hate the sin.” If, as a by-product of taking good care of yourself, you come to forgiveness, that’ll be great, because your load will be lighter. But don’t try to force yourself to do something that, today, you can’t do sincerely.

*Editor’s Note: I suspect that many have been confronted with issues of forgiveness. More than likely it has been especially difficult for those Catholics and other Christians who have had the notion of forgiveness ingrained in them since childhood. Even more difficult for those who have suffered physical, emotional, psychological, and/or spiritual abuse from family members and those we have been taught to trust and respect. I am of the opinion that confronting whether or not to withhold forgiveness and dwelling on the anger and hurt can become a diabolical addiction.*

*When I read Tom’s article, I deemed it something our members and readers, and their family, loved ones, and friends might find of value for reflection and discernment. I believe it has nuggets of truth and compassion leading to healing and peace.*

*Tom Moon is a native San Franciscan, born in the Mission District in 1948, and raised in the Bay Area. He became a licensed psychotherapist in 1978, and has been in private practice since then. Tom is a writer, and his column, “The Examined Life,” appears regularly in Los Angeles Frontiers and the San Francisco Bay Times. His web site is [www.tommoon.net](http://www.tommoon.net).*