

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.

DIGNITYUSA YOUNG ADULTS

Welcome to This Edition of QV

By Bill Welch, Editor

Welcome to this edition of *QV: Quarterly Voice* whose theme is “DignityUSA Young Adults.”

I thank Holog Bashi, Lauren Carpenter, John Falcone, Jamie L. Manson, and Victor Postemski for their time, effort, and interest in sharing their personal stories and commentary with our DignityUSA community and friends. They rightfully point to how the relationship of mutual respect, attentive listening, quest for understanding, working together, and caring love and support can be bonding forces beneficial to young and older adults and our community at large. Such forms of welcome and cooperation provide the groundwork for the continuity of the mission and leadership of DignityUSA at the national and local levels.

I believe you will find the articles inspirational and commendable. Hopefully they will serve as notice of desired sharing and ongoing dialogue. I welcome your comments and feedback for future editions of this publication and consideration by our National Board of Directors, leaders at all levels, and members at large. Please direct your communications to me at DUSAEditor@comcast.net. Thank you.

My Journey with DignityUSA

By Lauren Carpenter, President, DignityUSA Young Adult Caucus

Maybe this is not something that the President of the DignityUSA Young Adult Caucus (DYAC) should reveal. I have to admit that I sometimes get a little anxious when DignityUSA members eagerly ask me certain questions. “What do young adults need? What are their values? What kind of Mass do they like? How on earth can we get more of them into our chapter?” I get anxious because I know that there is no easy answer. Because I know that my perspectives, values, and needs are unique, and I feel



Lauren Carpenter

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uncomfortable trying to speak for all young adult Catholics. This is why I am so excited that the editor of the *QV: Quarterly Voice* has asked us young adults to share our personal stories. It is my hope that this issue will help all of us understand that young adults, just like all adults, are unique individuals whose wants and needs cannot be generalized. I also hope that it demonstrates that, while we do have many generational differences, we are probably less mysterious and have more in common with other generations than they might think. The next step, and our big challenge in the coming years, will be learning how to honor these differences while finding our common ground. This will require some serious dialogue and interaction. As a start, let me share my personal story with you.

I have always loved the Catholic Church; I was raised Catholic, went to a Catholic high school, and was a youth group fanatic. Being a devout young Catholic meant that I experienced some extreme culture shock when I started my first year at Smith College, a private liberal arts college for women located in Northampton, Massachusetts, with a very liberal student body. Many teachings of the Catholic Church I took for granted came into question, and at the same time, I was tentatively discovering my own sexuality. The combination of the two drove me to a deep faith crisis. Luckily, I was blessed to find a small faith sharing group on campus called the “Radical Catholic Feminists of Smith.” The group introduced me to many wise Catholic women who helped me understand that it was possible to be

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queer, feminist, and Catholic. As graduation neared, I was nervous about trying to live this identity in the “real world,” uncertain if there was anyone else out there like me and my Catholic community at Smith.

After graduation, despite my hesitancy to associate myself with the larger Catholic Church, I took a leap of faith and joined the Jesuit Volunteer Corps (JVC), a year-long Catholic volunteer service program. I accepted a placement in the Social Services Office at a Catholic church in San Antonio, Texas. I would be living in community with five other volunteers and getting room, board, and \$80 a month in exchange for my service. I didn’t know quite what to expect, and I never would have guessed what a defining year it would be with respect to how I understood my role in the Catholic Church, the LGBT community, and the place where the two meet.

In many ways, joining JVC wasn’t as scary as I imagined because it was full of other young progressive Catholics eager to make a change in the world and in themselves. All of the other volunteers I met, and especially my own community in San Antonio, were so accepting and supportive of my sexuality. I was relieved to find such diversity and acceptance within the Catholic Church. JVC introduced me to the great social justice tradition of the Catholic Church, and helped me see my Catholic faith through a new lens. Working at a Catholic church also took my understanding of religion to a new level. I saw how people in the parish relied on each other, how they came to the parish church in their most vulnerable times, and how much joy and life were present in a community like that. It made me understand our common need for connection and community, and how a Catholic church can fill those needs.

Not everything was easy by any means. Despite my growing love for the Catholic Church and my realization of its beautiful potential, there was still a part of me that felt a little empty. I felt accepted and supported by all the people in my life, but I still yearned for more: I longed for the queer community I had left behind at Smith. I wanted to be part of a community where I wasn’t just accepted, but was celebrated, where I didn’t always have to assume judgment until support was explicitly stated, and where I could comfortably be my whole self again. When I saw a posting for a Mass with Dignity/San Antonio, I knew I had to check it out, even though I had very little idea of what it was or what kind of people would be there.

My decision to take a risk was rewarded with the most welcoming, gender inclusive Mass I had ever participated in, and with more joyful, gay Catholics than I ever knew existed. I was a little overwhelmed by all the hugging, and was too socially exhausted by the end of it to even think of going out to dinner with everyone that first night, but I knew I had experienced something special and that I would return. And I did. Somewhat sporadically at first, but then with increasing regularity. The more I came, the better I got to know people, and the more I wanted to come back. Over my months with Dignity/San Antonio, I was touched most profoundly by the

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Begun in 1969 in San Diego, CA under the leadership of Fr. Patrick Nidorf, OSA, first as a counseling group and then a support group in Los Angeles, DignityUSA has been a national organization since 1973 uniting GLBT Catholics, their families and friends.

DignityUSA is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose national office is located in the Greater Boston area, with chapters located throughout the United States.

Members gather at local chapters, periodic regional meetings and biennial national conventions.

The **QV** encourages the exchange of opinions, book reviews, reflections, background information, resource materials and essays and articles by established speakers and professionals touching on spirituality, human sexuality and its expression, and the mission of DignityUSA. Of special interest are personal experiences and what has worked well in areas of pastoral ministry, human and social justice issues, leadership, chapter and faith community building.

Opinions expressed in reflections, reviews, letters, etc., are those of their authors and not necessarily those of DignityUSA.

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relationships I witnessed. Women who had been together longer than I had been alive and who had built this community. Women celebrating the birth of their first child and women who had a whole troupe of children. There were loving relationships between straight moms who came with their gay daughters. And so, so many deep friendships—some between people who had known each other for years, and others between people newer to the group whose friendships were just as rich. I got to hear stories from all of them. I came to know many of the challenges they’d faced, and also their great joys. As a roaming, young adult transplant, I felt so incredibly blessed to be taken into this community.

My life in San Antonio was not meant to last forever though. As my year with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps came to an

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end, I decided to take a placement with Americorps working with formerly homeless adults in Washington, DC. Leaving Dignity/San Antonio broke my heart, but I was looking forward to being closer to my family and friends on the East Coast, and my girlfriend Sara, who was moving to Baltimore at the same time. And I knew I could stay connected to DignityUSA by joining the local chapter in Washington, DC.

In many ways, my move to Washington, DC, proved to be much more difficult than I anticipated. Work was hard, navigating the city was hard, living without my volunteer community was hard, and I missed everything about life in San Antonio. My first encounter with Dignity/Washington only seemed to make things worse. At our first Mass, Sara and I found ourselves surrounded by a church filled entirely with men, none of them close to our age. Mass was beautiful, but lacked the level of gender inclusivity I had become accustomed to in San Antonio. Everyone we met after Mass was extremely friendly and urged us to keep coming, but even so, I felt out of place. In my homesickness for San Antonio, I could see only the negatives of this new group and was blind to anything positive they might offer. In my first few months in DC, I went to Mass when I could, but never made it a priority.

Things started to change in January 2010 when I became the president of the newly formed DignityUSA Young Adult Caucus. I felt guilty for having a leadership role and not trying harder with my local chapter, so I made it a goal to go more regularly. I got to know people better and felt more at home in the community. I saw that Dignity/Washington was also a deeply rooted and tightly knit community. I came to accept the fact that they were not Dignity/San Antonio and never would be, and that was okay. They were their own unique chapter that served the needs of a different population. Today I know that if I were going to continue to live in Washington, DC, I would probably look for a community that was a better fit for my needs as a young adult woman, but I also know that I would have stayed connected to Dignity/Washington, finding peace in the music at Mass, attending their spirited events, and making many new friends.

But as it is, my life is about to change yet again. As my Americorps year comes to an end, I stand on the edge of yet a new relationship with DignityUSA and with the Catholic Church. In August 2010 I will move to Baltimore and will get to attend the Catholic church that Sara and I have been attending on our "Baltimore weekends" this year. It's not a Dignity Chapter and as far as we know, there is only one other gay couple, but the church meets our needs in other ways. The priest delivers inspiring homilies rooted in a sound knowledge of the historical context of the Scriptures, there is a young adult community where we have already made many friends, the parish has vibrant social justice ministries, and the music is great. Most important, we have felt welcomed and loved for who we are from day one. Yes, they do have some room for improvement in terms of gender inclusive language, and I still

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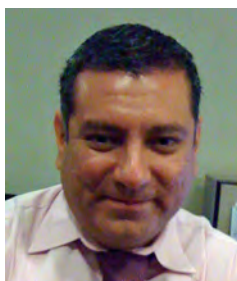
have some unresolved questions about what it means to be part of a church that is directly tied to the Catholic hierarchy, but am comforted by the fact that our fellow parishioners are also working through these difficult questions. I look forward to engaging in the struggle with them.

Community has always been a key element of my draw to DignityUSA. I have loved hugging everyone at the sign of peace in San Antonio, and laying on hands during the anointing of the sick in Washington, DC. I have loved discussions over dinner with Dignity/San Antonio, and meeting people over post-Mass hors d'oeuvres with Dignity/Washington. In the coming months, I will certainly miss these personal interactions, these weekly connections with people who share a special part of my identity, but I also know that I will experience community in different ways. I will experience community in my monthly conference calls with young adults across the nation as we share our hopes and dreams for young adults in DignityUSA. I will experience community when I am hurt by some offensive thing the pope or other members of the Catholic Church hierarchy say and DignityUSA collectively stands up for who I am. And I am already counting down the days until DignityUSA Convention 2011 in Washington, DC, when I will experience community with the people all over the country I have met in the first two years of my rich and varied journey with DignityUSA.

My Journey in Faith and Cultures

By Holog Bashi, New York City

My name is Holog Bashi. I am 37 years old and have been living in New York since 2002. During my first days living here, I contacted Brendan Fay who invited me to attend Mass at Dignity/New York. From that moment, Dignity became one of the most important places for my spiritual growth during my first year in New York City.



Holog Bashi

I was born and raised in Lima, Peru. After completing my primary and secondary education with the Augustinian Fathers in Lima, I was accepted to the Catholic University of Lima where I got my Bachelor in Theology degree and finished my studies for my Master in Divinity degree (Pastoral Theology).

I worked in the field of education for several years in Peru after I graduated in 1996. I taught Philosophy, Religious Education, Biblical studies, Biblical Spirituality, the Theology of Sacraments, and Spanish. I also worked for the Archbishop in Lima at the Vicary for Youth. After that assignment, I was hired to be the vice-principal of a prestigious school for girls run by the Dominican Sisters, a mission I proudly performed for my last 5 years in Lima before coming to the United States.

Even though I had a career in Peru, and an expected positive future surrounded by love of family and friends, I felt something was missing in my life. In 2001, I accepted myself as a gay man which wasn't easy at all. Peruvian culture is still very conservative. I decided to stay closeted for friends and family and not show what I wanted and how I wanted to live my life.

In 2001, I suffered a discriminatory incident by the Peruvian police who frisked me just because they found me leaving a gay establishment, and after that they kept harassing me in many ways. This incident caused me a lot of suffering and a deep wound in my heart and soul, and of course in my religious life. That is why, in 2002, I decided to leave Peru.

During my first week in New York City, I was invited to Dignity/New York in the Village. I remember the first time I went to their Mass. Tears ran from my eyes because it was the first time I felt so safe, that I could pray freely, and feel again the connection between my being gay and Catholic without fear. Dignity definitively was the impulse I needed to continue my spiritual journey, to continue belief in love at peace, in being myself without any kind of threat, and more importantly, to feel proud of who I am and being God's child. I felt like I was born again, but this time, in the Truth of His love, mercy, and providence.

I met my first friends in New York City amidst the faith community of Dignity/New York. I found wonderful people who became not only good friends through these years, but also family, because they showed me the love of God with their generosity and care. This kind of friendship was one of the signs of the love of God in my journey in this country.

Living in a foreign country, leaving behind all my "securities" I had in Peru, I discovered many other aspects of God's presence in my life. My faith in Him has grown. I believe even more in Him and his providential love that never abandoned me and kept me alive in many ways. Now I am able to spread his love again among my family and friends here.

Nowadays I work as an Admission's Counselor for a medical institute in Manhattan helping students to realize the value of an education and assisting them with the student admissions process.

My faith gives me the energy to continue my journey in this country, to offer my time as a volunteer, to meet my old and new friends, and share and celebrate life together as gay people. I still believe in my Catholic Church as the place where I can pray and worship God. I am very involved now with different parishes in Manhattan and Brooklyn that welcome our LGBT community in the heart of the Catholic Church.

All these experiences have given me the opportunity to grow, not only as a Christian man, but also as a human being who awaits God's promises and tries to live His Word in my daily life.

How I Was Energized by Dignity/New York and DignityUSA

By Jamie L. Manson, New York City

As an outspoken, openly lesbian, feminist Catholic with a Master of Divinity degree, my job prospects are limited. If I do manage to land a ministerial position at a congregation, the amount of time I remain welcome at a church usually ends up being somewhat limited. When I was in Divinity School, no one told me that the commitment to “speak truth to power,” works out a lot better when you’re speaking to powers external to the congregation than it does when speaking to powers within the congregation.



Jamie L. Manson

It’s even been tough to hold on to speaking invitations recently. I write a monthly column for the *National Catholic Reporter*. Now and then I seem to hit a nerve with an essay, which sometimes leads to speaking invitations from parishes and high schools, and once, even a book invitation from a publisher. Eventually, my invitees read other essays in which I speak about being a proudly partnered lesbian or about my service to the board of the Women’s Ordination Conference. And, almost as quickly as the invitations were made, they are taken away. There is a lot of fear out there among those still trying to work within the institution of the Roman Catholic Church.

The presence of the community of Dignity/New York in my life has stood in stark contrast to these other parishes and groups. Regardless of what organization was wavering in their welcome to me, the hospitality of Dignity/New York became warmer. When women’s preaching was ended at a parish I was serving, Dignity/New York invited me more frequently. When another congregation let me go, Dignity/New York’s only criticism was that I didn’t come and worship with them more often!

The witness by DignityUSA and Dignity/New York has been powerful for me. Dignity members have walked the painful road of expulsion from a parish community, so they understand the wounds such alienation creates. But they also have lived as a resurrection community and stand in witness to the deep theological truth that no one can separate God from God’s beloved children. They honor the Catholic sacramental belief that the life of God is available to anyone who seeks it, whether inside or outside the walls of the institutional Catholic Church. The impact of the Dignity/New York community has not only been personal for me, but it has also provided a living example of my deepest religious conviction that a Eucharistic community can arise anywhere, because Jesus’ table can be set anywhere and by anyone. No one has the power to say where God can and cannot be made fully present.

DignityUSA is free of fear and worry that keeps so many Catholics from flourishing and growing fully into the human

beings God created. They are able to take the courageous risks of love that other Catholic communities either compromise on or avoid altogether. For these reasons, I believe they are a model community that has deep potential to guide and influence the lives of young Catholics.

Many predict rightly that in the near future there will be fewer Catholics in the U.S. and Europe, and that these Catholics will be much more pious than the generations that preceded them in the 1960s and 1970s. That’s all well and good for that marginal group, but what happens to the tens of millions of baptized Catholics who do not fit this rigid mold of unquestioning devotion to a church that continually fortifies its medieval structures? The younger generations and the generations to come will be hungrier than ever for community to feed and support them in an increasingly secular, individualistic world. They will be thirsting for guidance on moral questions about commitment, child-rearing, illness, and death, but will not seek it from a church that abandoned them in its own reactionary quest for self-preservation.

DignityUSA, in its courageous independence, holds a unique position to convey to new generations the best parts of the Catholic tradition and those uniquely Catholic ideas—like ritual and sacrament, spirituality, and the pursuit of social justice—that keep DignityUSA calling itself Catholic. They will also teach newer generations that they do not need to remain enslaved to an institution with an ever-eroding moral fabric; an institution that demands that one participate in one’s own oppression in order to be a member.

This prophetic courage has brought the Dignity/New York community and me to a critical point in our relationship. And it has raised a question that still remains unresolved.

In 2007, Dignity/New York invited Victoria Rue, one of the few openly lesbian members of the Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP) group, to preside at their annual Pride liturgy. In 2005, Victoria was one of the first North American women ordained in the RCWP movement which began in 2002 with the ordination of seven women on the Danube River. Because these women were ordained by validly consecrated bishops (one, the Argentine Bishop Romulo Braschi, and another bishop whose identity remains under lock and key to this day), Roman Catholic Womenpriests hold that their ordinations are valid, because their ordaining bishops are in succession with Peter.

Victoria Rue’s Pride Mass was a heavily attended event. Women and men who never went to Dignity liturgies came out in droves. The liturgy prompted a number of Dignity friends to ask me when I was going to join the movement, so that I too could celebrate Mass for the community.

I have struggled with this question ever since. I first felt called to the priesthood when I was in high school. It was this calling that led me to eventually pursue my Master of Divinity degree and spend much of my career in church-based ministry. Dignity/New York was the community that continued to give me life as I moved through churches and organizations latent with

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fear, homophobia, and misogyny. So, it felt strange for me to move away from Dignity/New York for a while to go to the RCWP to become a validly ordained priest. It felt as if I would have to be “outsourced” to another reform group in order for God to fully function within me.

The fact that Catholic communities do not have any say whatsoever in the training or choice of their leadership is one of the root causes of so much harm in the Catholic Church today. DignityUSA has a great legacy of correcting the misguided judgments that the Roman Catholic institution has made, especially in its stance on the full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons in the sacraments. There is now an opportunity for DignityUSA to make a prophetic impact on the way in which Catholic communities select and form their ministerial leadership.

As a feminist, I fully support any Catholic women’s movement toward its own ministerial empowerment. However, it is not the model that I am choosing to pursue as a Catholic woman minister. For me, it would feel much more authentic to be ordained by the community that has given me extraordinary support and opportunities to express what I believe is God’s calling. The laying on of hands by members of the Dignity/New York is as valid an ordination as I could imagine. The spirit of God has moved sacramentally through Dignity communities from their beginnings, so what could prevent the power of God from moving in this way as well?

My own questions are a small part of the larger issue concerning the future of DignityUSA’s spiritual and ministerial leadership. Right now, Dignity/New York’s Sunday Masses are presided over by a male priest who was ordained in the Roman Catholic Church decades ago. Most of these priests subsequently left active priestly ministry and, in most cases, moved on to live openly gay lives in committed same-sex relationships. In the past few years (since Victoria Rue’s celebration, in fact), Dignity/New York has broken with this tradition on Pride weekend, and has opted to have eight or ten presiders during their Pride liturgy. Of these presiders, usually one is an ordained priest, while the others are lay women and men. Though one is usually a priest, all have equal roles throughout the liturgy. It is as moving as it is prophetic.

For every other weekend of the year, Dignity/New York continues to have an inactive male Roman Catholic priest as celebrant. As the number of ordained priests begins to dwindle and the newly ordained become more and more conservative, what will become of this system of choosing presiders?

If some Dignity chapters have concerns about becoming an ordaining body, another option could be for DignityUSA to work more collaboratively with ordaining movements like RCWP. The ordination question aside, I believe that the need for Catholic reform groups to integrate their efforts and share resources is urgent not only for their future flourishing, but for their relevance to newer generations. One of the most exciting things about emerging generations of Catholics is that many of

them were not raised in strict Catholic homes, so the traditional symbols of the Catholic Church, like the priesthood and the episcopacy, do not hold the same symbolic power as they did decades ago. Newer generations will also be more accepting of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, so there may be less need for organizations to be dedicated exclusively to LGBT people or women’s issues. There will likely be a natural progression toward, and desire for, more integration.

However DignityUSA chooses to pursue this question of leadership, its members will act from a place of spiritual courage and strength. This is DignityUSA’s legacy and its current challenge. For decades, they have incarnated their conviction that sacramental power exists within them as a community of lay and ordained LGBT people. Together with its new generations of members, DignityUSA is called to move forward in responding pastorally and prophetically to the needs of the body of Christ.

Jamie Manson received her Master of Divinity degree from Yale Divinity School where she studied Catholic theology, personal commitments, and sexual ethics with Mercy Sr. Margaret Farley. A columnist for the National Catholic Reporter, she is the first place winner of the 2010 Catholic Press Association award for Best Commentary—General Commentary. As a lay minister she has worked extensively with New York City’s homeless and poor populations.

Renewed Faith through DignityUSA

By Victor Postemski, President, Dignity/Boston and Vice President, DignityUSA Young Adult Caucus

I graduated college with a Bachelor in History degree from Sacred Heart University. Soon after, I left my Eastern Connecticut home and moved to Boston in 2002 to begin graduate school and my career in higher education administration. As a lifelong Catholic, I always questioned how my life as a gay man could intersect with my faith. After all, the Catholic Church had been continuously vocal with its position on homosexuality, especially in recent years.



Victor Postemski

My faith was rocked when the sex abuse crisis within the Catholic Church became a story that shook the global community. The local news media was persistent in its coverage of the crisis since Boston was ground zero. I kept asking myself (as I do today), how could the institutional Catholic Church cover up this behavior? How could the institution condone the abuse of children and then blame it solely on gay priests? Lack of leadership, morality, and common sense by people of authority within the Catholic Church are some of the key factors that perpetuated behavior that can only be seen as shameful.

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Soon I began calling myself a “quiet Catholic,” one who stopped attending Mass and rarely told anyone my religious background as a gay man. After all, how could I belong to a church that blamed members of our gay community for this crisis? I was bitter and hurt by the institution that upheld a message to love and protect all of God’s children. It seemed only logical to find myself giving up on the Roman Catholic Church.

Given my disconnect with the Catholic Church, yet yearning for spiritual fulfillment, it seemed appropriate that I was drawn to Dignity/Boston. I had seen advertisements in the local LGBT newspaper and decided to attend liturgy after a great deal of reflection and “nudging” by a good friend. It was perhaps the best advice I could have taken from her.

I attended my first Dignity/Boston liturgy about six years ago, in summer 2004. My first thought after walking in and witnessing a lay led service was “wow, this place is like post-Vatican III!”

Dignity/Boston and DignityUSA are definitely places I am comfortable calling my spiritual home—places where my whole self is celebrated. My sexual orientation is not feared or questioned and I can worship God without fear of persecution and homophobia. Dignity has renewed my faith and I truly believe my story is one that can be shared by many.

DignityUSA’s success as an organization is contingent on more young people stepping forward and continuing the legacy pioneered by LGBT Catholics who came before us. We need to renew the faith of those young adults who feel excluded from the Catholic Church. It is our responsibility to inspire them to join and strengthen our community. Without DignityUSA, we will become voiceless. It is with DignityUSA that we will challenge and hold the church hierarchy accountable for their actions or indifference on issues of importance to the LGBT community or women. It is our turn to live out the church as God truly intended. Who will live it with me?

How Can DignityUSA Members Welcome and Engage Young Adults?

By John Falcone, Ph.D. student at Boston College

How can DignityUSA members welcome and engage young adults? I’d like to propose two areas for reflection, along with a theological resource that sheds light on each. The first is ageism and pastoral empowerment; the second is postmodern culture.



John Falcone

Ageism

Like all oppressions, ageism cuts many different ways. We know the stereotypes. To be youthful is to be beautiful and desirable, perhaps naïve. To be older is to be overbearing, bitter, dangerous, and predatory. Whether through ignorance, habit, or unresolved hurts, we may act upon or act out our ageism. Ageism may jump out, or we may bend over backwards to hold it back. We may even come to believe and internalize the stereotypes—whether those about the “other” or those about ourselves. In every case, ageism drives a wedge between younger and older adults in our communities—it serves a classic function of “divide and conquer.”

If ageism is about oppression and division, a Gospel response must foster empowerment and unity. *Passing on the Faith: Transforming Traditions for the Next Generation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims*, edited by James L. Heft, S.M. (Fordham University Press, 2006), offers good guidance. The writings, by theologians, sociologists, and ministry leaders, discuss how to connect young adults with congregational life and religious traditions. To me, the essays on “Congregations That Get It,” by Tobin Belzer, Richard Flory, Nadia Roumani, and Brie Loskota, and “A Portrait of a Revitalized Synagogue,” by Rabbi J. Rolando Matalon, are particularly thought provoking.

The authors of “Congregations That Get It” interviewed young adults who had become deeply involved and remained in congregational life, and the pastors of the dynamic congregations they chose to join. Although Americans from Christian, Jewish, and Muslim backgrounds were interviewed, the themes were surprisingly consistent:

- Young adults are wary of institutions, but attracted to community. (How do our chapters infuse the necessary work of a volunteer organization with the spirit of community and personal connection?)
- Young adults are put off by religious divisiveness. (Is there undue tension between the chapter and other ministries, or within the chapter itself?)
- They want to feel that their presence is valued—whether through space, time, or funding. (Do we recognize and celebrate the contributions of young adults, especially when their commitment to religious practice so bucks the trend?)
- They value a sense of ownership within their congregation. (Do chapters offer younger members the opportunity to lead other young people? To move into committee leadership or chapter office? Do established members offer good mentoring and support?)
- They hunger to experience and understand their faith more deeply. (How do our liturgies and other activities expose all our members to the richness of Catholic ritual, theology, and popular religiosity?)
- They are attracted to communities where they can think critically and analyze the world in which they live. (Do our chapters open up spaces to engage gender, race, ethnicity, and class in incisive ways? Do they open up spaces to generate creative solutions?)

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How Can DignityUSA Members Welcome and Engage Young Adults?
Continued from page 7

Similar themes arise in the essay “BJ: A Portrait of a Revitalized Synagogue.” It tells the story of B’nai Jeshrun, a New York synagogue which is renowned for the outstanding way in which young adults are involved and incorporated in congregational life. The rabbi there lists four features that a recent ethnographic study identified as central to B’nai Jeshrun’s congregational life:

- 1) The centrality of the experience of the divine.
- 2) The expectation of an engaged participatory membership.
- 3) An approach to Jewish practice in which existing materials are used and combined in a way that creates something new and unexpected.
- 4) A rabbi-led congregational structure.

Although the setting is quite distinct from that of most Dignity chapters, the issues are certainly relevant.

- *Leadership and ownership.* Within any organization, there are many leaders: officers and volunteers, organizers, and elders. At B’nai Jeshrun, the rabbi is clearly in charge, focusing and centering the mission and vision; at the same time, there is a clear understanding that without each member’s contributions and leadership, the congregation cannot function or survive. In other words, B’nai Jeshrun has struck a successful balance between a vigorous directiveness and an invitational model of membership. In Christian language, we might call this a balance between clear pastoral vision and a spirit of self-emptying leadership (the theological term is *kenosis*). In this respect, overcoming ageism also involves overcoming the patterns of behavior associated with clericalism, in which members look to the priest or the pastoral leader(s) to provide all the direction and do all the work.

- *Liturgy, tradition and creativity.* How can we use our Catholic tradition in new ways? Dignity chapters around the country have already generated powerful examples, including Mary of Magdala services, creative re-appropriation of traditional rituals, and LGBTQ interpretation of classical theological themes in our preaching and publications. Engaging young adults means doing more of this kind of work.

- *Spirituality.* How can we suffuse our liturgical and volunteer life more deeply in prayer and worship? How can we organize our chapters so that it is easier to love each other and to love God? As Paul has written, none of these organizational and symbolic considerations will matter, unless “the greatest of these” is love. (1 Cor 13)

Postmodernity

Embracing the energy and leadership that young adults have to offer can feel particularly disconcerting to more established community members when they understand how different the religious and ideological world of contemporary young adults can be. The key cultural and intellectual reality of the rising generation is probably best named as “postmodernity”—the combination of advanced marketing, cultural relativism, and globalization. Boundaries are more fuzzy, certainty more elusive, trustworthiness more rare. Media overload makes

symbols easier to mix and to match; it also makes suffering, injustice, and ecological collapse more vivid and hard to ignore. Some people may lose their sense of direction; others turn to fundamentalisms (e.g., toward the pope, or Tradition, or Evangelical Biblicism).

Mark Wedig’s 2008 article, “Postmodernity, the New Faithful, and Challenges to Liturgical Ministry” (*Liturgical Ministry*, Winter 2008) provides an excellent primer on these issues. He points to an important shift in thought processes. To the children of postmodernism, it is no longer clear what all Catholics everywhere should always be doing. Instead, the question is: How to be deeply and visibly Catholic, right here and now? Wedig echoes many insights from *Passing on the Faith*. His undergraduate students are hungry to exercise a sacramental imagination and to connect rituals with ethical life. They pray in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament before setting off on social justice demonstrations; they embrace ethnic and ancient forms of Catholicism; they respect diversity. Yet they often lack the words to explain how sacramentality, social justice, and righteous anger can fit together.

Conclusion

These and other essays express a growing consensus among students of ministry with young adults. Believers who are emerging into personal and professional maturity hunger for concrete practices, deep spirituality, relevant mentoring, and responsible participation in community life. To attract and retain young adults, as suggested by these essays, Dignity chapters must offer respect for young adults’ talents, space for their friendships, and non-overwhelming opportunities when they are ready to step up and lead. Chapters must also offer coherent and cogent models for being Catholic in a less denominational, more pluralistic world. The best of these models will not provide “the” answer. They will present younger (and older) members with examples of Catholic traditions reinvigorated and reshaped for a real and pressing need. And they will invite members to take up the traditions at their disposal, and do the same.

Implementing our ministry as LGBTQ Catholics and allies involves both tackling ageism and addressing postmodernity. LGBTQ young adults can learn much from those who have gone before them in the struggle and in the faith. By the same token, LGBTQ elders and allies can learn much from rising generations, without whose energy, passion, and insider perspective on contemporary life our Dignity communities cannot survive.



A Critique on Misogyny and Homophobia Article in QV: Quarterly Voice for First Quarter 2010

By José-Manuel Navarro, Ph.D., DignityUSA Member, Philadelphia, PA

June 7, 2010

Compañero Leo N. Egashira
Publications Committee Chair
DignityUSA

Apreciado y Estimado Compañero Leo:

It is with a sad heart and agonizing pain that I must express the offense I felt upon reading Fr. John J. McNeill's comments about Latinos and Muslims in his article "Misogyny and Homophobia," published in *The Quarterly Voice*, Vol. 9, No. 1 for the First Quarter of 2010. The article ranges from Pages 2 through 5. My analysis will be limited to two comments Mc Neill makes on Page 3. My observations seek to promote healthy introspection, education, clarification, and continuous dialogue.

In what is generally an eloquently articulated and highly educational article reflecting Fr. McNeil's intellectual puissance, brother John commits the two mistakes that I must fraternally request that DignityUSA, *The Quarterly Voice*, and Mc Neill retract and disown.

The first comment that I must decry is the one about "Latinos," that rebarbatively ubiquitous U.S. term that seeks to homogenize 22 magnificent nationalities, dismissing individual national cultural qualities and elegance. In his disparaging statement, McNeill appears to affirm that all of us "Latinos," adhere to what he labels the "strong tradition" of "despising the man who plays the passive role of receiver" in sexual relations. I would not doubt that there may be individuals within the "Latino" demographic cohort who may subscribe to this view. However, to single out "Latinos" in an article that properly and passionately damns Western society for our ills is improper, unjust, and borders on racism. Let me emphasize, on what may be an aside that I deem important to affirm, that brother John does not quote any research-based authority to substantiate his argument.

Keeping my comments within the fraternal critique that I underscored at the beginning of this writing, I believe that *el compañero Juan* is unconsciously, unwittingly and unwaringly espousing prevailing U.S. racist and xenophobic views about those of us who hail from 22 "Latino/a" nationalities. It is my belief that a writer on these two profound topics of misogyny and homophobia is to be objective and seek out supporters. With his unquestioning acceptance of the stereotypes I have described, I fear that *el compañero Juan* may have alienated many of us, even though, I repeat, I don't believe that this was his conscious intention.

The second comment that I must decry appears a few paragraphs after the comment on "Latinos." It is the comment about what *el compañero Juan* calls "Muslim society." Here, *el compañero Juan* affirms that it is his "impression" that "certain sectors" of "Muslim society" value "male aggressiveness and dominance." While I laud brother John's honesty in affirming that this is merely his "impression," I must insist that your readers understand that this, just as with the "Latino" statement, is stated without any scholarly research-based information. There are, as with "Latinos," a plethora of *Muslim* societies, not just one. I am certain that there are differences in Muslim societies that we who are victimized by patriarchal and imperialist propaganda are not aware of.

My point in writing to you is to emphasize that what *el hermano Juan* argues for two all-continental and significant of this planet's peoples are the fundamental pillars of all of the Judeo-Christian Western society that we all inherit. Let *mi hermano's Juan* mistakes shine as an example to all of us of how systemic oppression, exploitation, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny, and racism seeps into all of us.

Further, let me also call for a commitment from all of us who espouse and struggle for human rights to be judiciously aware of our unconsciously and unthinkingly accepting view of an oppressive and exploitative ideology which infects us all—one that we all consciously deplore. Let us all concentrate on debunking this ignominious heritage whose moral turpitude would engorge us all, if we do not resist it consciously with all of the energy at our individual and collective disposal.

My concern is that someone of Juan's intellectual puissance and influence may unwillingly and unknowingly lend credence to and strengthen the stereotypes and ignominy I censure in our Judeo-Christian heritage and the gerontocracy that governs the Roman Catholic Church, the institution we all seek to change from a medieval fiefdom into the truly life-affirming, individual-respecting, gay- and lesbian-honoring and individual conscience-honoring entity that we all deserve. In sum, *mi hermano Juan* should have been more cautious in his writing and correcting his copy before going to press.

My last comment regarding the article, *mi hermano Leo*, I must address to you and the entire Publications Committee. I hold all of you who make up the Committee equally responsible for not picking up on *nuestro hermano's Juan* grave errors by not carrying out a judicious reading of Juan's article before you printed it.

Dignity and *The Quarterly Voice* have successfully made enormously historic and heroic strides in reclaiming dignity for gays, lesbians, transgender, transsexual, and intersexed-identified persons. I fear that Juan's comments, unwittingly and unwillingly as I take them to be, undermine this work in its reductionist approach and overgeneralizations of the diverse and complex "Latino" and "Muslim" cultures.

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A Critique on Misogyny and Homophobia Article in QV: Quarterly Voice for First Quarter 2010 Continued from page 9

However, I trust that it is not the goal of *mi hermano Juan* or this magazine: to reclaim the dignity of the groups we support at the expense of the dignity of others. The name “Dignity” in our organization affirms to the world what we want for the groups we support. I want that same dignity extended to the “Latino” and “Muslim” cultures that Juan names in his article and that *The Quarterly Voice* may be understood to espouse by printing his article without judicious copy editing. Those of us singled out by Juan J. McNeill deserve that same dignity and respect.

Fraternalmente,

José-Manuel Navarro, Ph. D.

José-Manuel Navarro, a Puerto Rican member of DignityUSA, is an independent scholar living in Philadelphia. A former college and university professor and university administrator, he holds Master's degrees in Multicultural Education and Latin American Studies and a doctorate in History. José-Manuel ended his salaried teaching career as a Bilingual Social Studies teacher for nine years at what was, before the Bilingual Program was eliminated from it, the first bilingual high school in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. While teaching Puerto Rican and Dominican students in high school during the day, José-Manuel taught students from Euro-American, African American and Latin American backgrounds in the evenings as Senior Lecturer in Bilingual and Bicultural Studies at a Philadelphia-area Catholic University, where he taught graduate courses in Puerto Rican History, Culture, and Literature and supervised and edited Master's Projects written in English and Spanish.

Response by John J. McNeill

Please extend my sincere apology to José-Manuel Navarro, and to all those who my comment on Latin cultural machismo in my article proved offensive. I agree that my statement was made in a much too universal fashion and without nuance.

**Response by Leo N. Egashira
DignityUSA Publications Committee Chair**

Dear Dr. José-Manuel Navarro:

Thank you for your thoughtful, insightful letter. On behalf of the Publications Committee and DignityUSA, I apologize to you, other Latinos/as, Muslims, and indeed all minorities—be they ethnic, religious, cultural, or sexual.

As a Japanese-American, I am usually quite aware of broad statements made about Asians. Due to the wide variation in ethnicity, linguistics, culture, and religion among Asians, they can make no sense. I should have caught and questioned the broad statements made about Latino and Islamic societies—both of which have many societies of considerable variation therein.

Please accept my apologies with the understanding that we will endeavor to be more vigilant about making and detecting broad, culturally-biased statements in our publications.

**Response by Bill Welch
DignityUSA Editor**

Dear Dr. José-Manuel Navarro:

Thank you for your detailed, respectfully challenging, yet supportive letter.

Your letter rightfully challenges stereotypical or other generalizations and use of, or reference to, statements which are undocumented, unproven, questionable, or not based on research.

Neither I, nor volunteer members of our publications review team, possess or lay claim to the in-depth and sophisticated scholarship, training, or experience in multi-cultural or multi-ethnic studies or settings such as described in your brief biographical sketch outlined beneath your article. Nor are we research analysts.

We recently advanced the required submittal due date to add time to the production cycle for authentication and validation of content and references, working with contributors to assure quality and accuracy, testing of email and URL addresses, and photo editing.

The review team is usually constrained from one to three days at most to check for spelling, grammar, punctuation, and clarity of content.

We will investigate the addition of a volunteer associate editor.

My team members and I will commit ourselves to more rigorous reviews of publication content.



BOOK REVIEW

That Undeniable Longing: My Road to and from the Priesthood

By Mark Tedesco

Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 2010, Paperback, 208pp., \$16.95, Hardback edition 2006

Reviewed by Paul F. Keaveney

Mark's mother died when he was 14. Any affection or affirmation he had ever known died with her. His father had never shown any interest in Mark's life. Is it any wonder that, as the title says, Mark had "That Undeniable Longing"? The subtitle is "My Road *to* and *from* the Priesthood. It was certainly not going to be a smooth road, but it was an interesting, if conflicted, one. Although he had many positive experiences, he describes himself in negative terms such as alone, alienated, depressed, and trapped.

At 19, Mark entered the San Vittorino seminary outside Rome in the fall of 1978. He was very excited about this new phase of his life and felt that he was on the brink of a great adventure. At the end of his fifth year, "All desires faded as one greater yearning grew: to leave this place, to seek a new existence." He was granted a one year leave of absence. When that year ended, he was refused re-admittance to San Vittorino.

Mark was admitted to the North American College (NAC) in Rome in 1984. The NAC was more about politics than faith and he decided to make it the place where he lived, and nothing more. He joined the Communion and Freedom (CF) spirituality movement and spent time with that community whenever possible.

His emotional state began to manifest itself as sexual desire, but he did not want to become sexually active. He had recognized sexual feelings towards men but rationalized them in several ways, never admitting to himself that he was a homosexual. His first sexual encounter occurred on his fifth visit to a nude beach.

Mark persevered through therapy ordered by his superiors, a master's degree, profession of first vows, and ordination to the diaconate in St. Peter's basilica, although he was not sure he had arrived at complete emotional stability.

In June of 1988, he was ordained to the priesthood in his California parish with many friends from Rome present. His first assignment was to a poor parish where his ministry was unfulfilling. He wanted to be faithful to his priesthood, but after two years he was using chat rooms on the internet to find sexual partners.

In 1993 Mark was granted permission to pursue a doctorate in moral theology at Catholic University in Washington, DC. That same year he began to explore the city sexually in gyms, bars, and clubs. He also entered therapy during which he finally accepted his homosexuality.

At the end of his studies he refused his bishop's order to return to his parish. DC had become his home.

"In my whole life I had felt and acted as the victim of my circumstances, obeying those who had some power over me. I had never seen myself as having any ability to control my life or my destiny, but rather as one who passively accepted what I was given." Now he felt in control of his life. His future was filled with uncertainty, but he was free. In 1996 he moved back to California and, at the time of publication of the book, he was teaching in a California high school.

The book fulfills its promise in bringing us to the end of Mark's priesthood, but we learn nothing of the years between the end of the book's narrative and its publication. Does the last sentence still hold true: "I feel . . . happy"?

Mark's life brings to mind a book I read many years ago: *Necessary Losses* by Judith Viorst. Every life includes instances in which one has to let go of some part of one's past. Some circumstances involve a natural, if not necessarily comfortable, letting go as part of the maturing process. Other circumstances require one to let go of people, places, and things, the loss of which leads to severe and prolonged pain. Mark certainly had his share of the latter: two seminaries, a spiritual movement that played a significant role in his life, several men to whom he had deep, but unrequited bonds, and his priesthood.

Editor's note: Paul F. Keaveney, a member of Dignity/Columbus (Ohio), serves as a member of DignityUSA's publications review team for Dateline and QV: Quarterly Voice.

