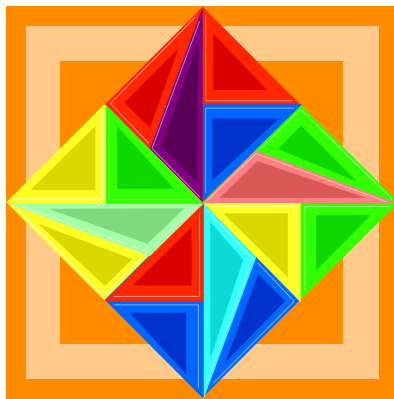


*DignityUSA works for respect and justice for all gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy and support.*



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## DIGNITYUSA AUSTIN CONVENTION ROUNDUP

### DignityUSA 18th Biennial Convention through the Eyes of a Convention Co-Chair

by Paula Lavallee, Co-Chair Convention 2007 and DignityUSA Secretary



It has been several weeks since our return from Austin and the DignityUSA 18th Biennial Convention. It was a long and busy week, but I have brought back with me so many memories and an uplifted spirit. I can agree with many of the comments on the evaluation forms of being renewed, refreshed, reconnected and ready to go forth.

I was not present in the beginning stages of planning for this convention when Chellie Griffin convinced the Texas chapters that they could do this. I am thankful for the support and work the Austin, Dallas, Houston and San Antonio chapters did several years ago. Many of those original planners were not present at the convention as their life journeys have taken them elsewhere, but their presence was felt. Jack Tweelings did a great job in convincing them to choose Austin as the host city and the Hyatt as our place of residence for the week. Jack's life was lovingly remembered during the convention in a memorial video and his spirit was felt by all. So I give thanks to the original planners and committee members who got us started, and then moved on: Chellie, Jack, Joe Sinico, Richard Cole, Chris Franke, and Bill Moon. I am so grateful for the team members who continued on through to the end and contributed so much to make the convention happen. They worked hard before and during the convention. So a big Dignity thank you goes out to:



*Continues on Page 2*

*DignityUSA 18th Biennial Convention through the Eyes of a Convention Co-Chair  
Continued from page 1*

- Mike Comeaux (Houston) for working on the Liturgy Committee and sharing his musical gifts in the choir
- Jim LeBlanc (Houston) for organizing and working the registration table
- Mike Sheahan (Houston) for help with the entertainment, general plans and transportation
- Margaret Thibodeaux (Houston) for getting the shirts designed and ordered and helping with registration
- Russell Windle (Dallas) for designing the advertising brochure

However, this convention would not have happened without the work of Gary Preuss (Austin). When I came on board in January 2007, Gary was basically holding the whole thing together by himself. He was doing most of the work of getting speakers lined up and all the other necessary tasks by himself. There are just too many things for one person to handle and since none of the other committee members felt they could be a co-chair, I was asked to take the position. (I think my experience co-chairing the Las Vegas convention helped make me a likely candidate.) Gary's work was invaluable for the success of this convention. He coordinated a wide slate of workshop presenters - something for everyone. He also found the entertainment for the opening ceremonies and the music for the dinner dance, got all the bios and workshop write-ups prepared for the program book and even took the picture that was used in the logo. Being in Austin, he coordinated much of the other work that needs to be done behind the scenes from goodie bags to transportation to piano rentals and so much more. I know he spent countless hours preparing for this convention and the success of it goes to him. Thank you Gary!

The fact that DignityUSA is a national organization is evident in the work done by so many others not in Texas who helped make this convention a success. Special thanks go to the Liturgy Committee members Peggy Burns (Boston), Mike Comeaux (Houston), Gene Corpuz (Honolulu), Bart Haggarty (New York) and Janet O'Day (Maine). Their work produced wonderful, spirit-filled celebrations. A special thanks to Bart for conducting the outstanding choir of volunteers. And thanks to the many Dignity members who volunteered by participating in the liturgies as singers, musicians, readers, Eucharistic Ministers, banner and cross bearers, dancers, leaders and presiders and all the other little and big tasks that were undertaken. Special thanks to homilist Nikki and presiders at the Eucharist Marty, Jane, Deb, and Tom.

Gary and I were getting a bit nervous when it came to print materials for this convention as this is not an area of expertise for either of us. However, DignityUSA is blessed with talent that pitched in and helped tremendously. Grateful thanks go to:

- Russell Windle (Dallas) for designing the advertising brochure for registration
- Bill Welch (San Jose), our Dateline and QV editor, who put together the Speakers and Program brochure for registration
- James Cappleman (Chicago) who did the design and layout of the Program Book
- M.A. Ladd (Boston) for putting together the Liturgy Program Book
- And special thanks to Chuck Provancher (Boston) for doing all the proof reading, edits, design of the covers, workshop signage, and getting everything posted on the website and sent to the printer.

Special thank yous go to all our speakers who came to Austin to share with us their expertise and wisdom. Thank you to: Bishop John Shelby Spong, Lynn Bauman, Tish Charette, Chris Connors, Sr. Stella DeVenuta, Brendan Fay, Kathy Ann Gianino, Sr. Jeannine Gramick, George Lucien Gregoire, Daniel Helminiak, Mark Jordan, Fredrikka Joy Maxwell, Tom Keene, John McNeill, Darryl Mitteldorf, Linda Pieczynski, Gary Preuss, Mario Torrigino, David Trissel, along with the Defenders and the DignityUSA Board of Directors. Although I was so busy I did not have time to attend any of the sessions, I heard bits and pieces of most from the door, and heard from others that they were inspiring, educational, thought-provoking and fun. Thanks also go to Jim Davis for our opening entertainment and to Max-n-Kirk Productions for the great music at the dance.

Thank you to the vendors who came: The Glass Menagerie, The Bookwoman, Gloria Owens, Sr. Stella, Frank O'Gorman, and New Ways Ministry. Special thanks to The Glass Menagerie and to Sr. Stella for donations to our Silent Auction.

Thanks also to Peter Edwards in our national office. Peter helped with the registration, printing the name tags, shipping materials and countless other little things. And to Tom Yates, who went into the office on a Sunday afternoon to find all the registration forms I was missing. Thanks Peter and Tom.

Thank you to Edwards Buice (Chicago) and Gene Corpuz (Honolulu) for their work on the Silent Auction. And to the DignityUSA Board of Directors, thanks for your help and support in so many ways.

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*DignityUSA 18th Biennial Convention through the Eyes of a Convention Co-Chair  
Continued from page 2*

Thank you to the staff and management at the Hyatt Regency Austin on Town Lake. The service was great, the food most wonderful, the staff marvelous. Many people remarked that the food was the best they have ever had at a convention. Special thanks to Laura Smeal, our Hyatt contact, who worked closely with Gary and me to be sure every little detail was just perfect. All the staff I talked to asked if we would come back; they really enjoyed having us there. If you ever find yourself in Austin, head to the Hyatt, you won't be sorry.

On a very personal note I would like to thank the women I fondly called my worker bees. They ran their tails off doing all the little last minute things that need to get done while I was in the board meetings the few days before the convention and then continued helping all during the weekend. Every time I needed something they were there. I would turn around and they would say "What do you need me to do?" and "What can I do now?" I'm sure I would have totally crashed had it not been for Kathy Ann and Alice Knowles, M.A. Ladd, and my wife Tish Charette. Thank you, ladies, for all your help and support, smiles and encouragement and tireless energy.

Many individuals and chapters gave very generous financial donations to help this convention succeed. Many thanks to all who shared their treasure with us. Your generosity is greatly appreciated. And finally, thank you to all the members who braved going to Austin in July to carry on the Dignity tradition of gathering to pray, to play, to learn, to educate ourselves, to plan the future and to celebrate who we are together.

Now we look forward to the next gathering in San Francisco in 2009. I am really looking forward to going and just enjoying the convention. So once more I say, "Thanks everyone for all your hard work. Thanks for sharing a great weekend together. And thank you, Gary, for all you gave to this convention. I look forward to meeting you in the choir in San Francisco."

*Editor's Note: To all our 2007 Conventioneers, members and friends of our Dignity family, drop a message to our Convention 2007 Co-Chairs to express your thanks and appreciation to them and their committee members for all their volunteer time, energy and commitment. Gary Preuss [Dignity2007@aol.com](mailto:Dignity2007@aol.com) and Paula Lavallee [Secretary@dignityusa.org](mailto:Secretary@dignityusa.org).*

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## A Conversation with a Pilgrim Bishop

By George M. Wetzel, Dignity/Houston

When John Shelby Spong, retired Episcopal Bishop of Newark, New Jersey, agreed to become the keynote speaker for the DignityUSA Convention in the summer of 2007, he was unsure of just quite what he was expected to do or to say.

Driving in from the Austin Airport, he was both inquisitive and disarming in his curiosities about our group. Having met a great many lesbian, gay, transgendered and bisexual human beings in his own journey out of his homophobia, he was tentative, even unsure, as to what his audience was expecting.

Still unresolved as he stepped to the podium, he chose to relate to this gathering a spiritual journey he began in his early youth and with his own religion of birth. Beginning with a good dollop of humor, he launched into a monologue that ranged from exposition, confession, narration and explanation as he recounted his journey and pilgrimage out of the racism, patriarchy, sexism, homophobia and ignorance as he found himself growing and learning in a career as an Episcopal priest.

Nothing, perhaps, could have disarmed a gathering of GLBT Catholics more than his candor, his honesty and his willingness to admit his failures and how he used these to further his spiritual path.

Honesty, candor and open-heartedness are rare birds over on the Roman side of Christianity, and he quickly had the audience in the palm of his hand.

In no way can I begin to do justice to the totality of his exposition. I can recommend that you go to your nearest bookstore and choose one book by him and let him open your eyes as he steps beyond the boundaries of tribe, gender prejudice, even religion – to create a new humanity.

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### *A Conversation with a Pilgrim Bishop* *Continued from page 3*

Read his autobiography, *Here I Stand*, and get the full flavor and context which amazed us in Austin. His books *The Sins of Scripture*, or *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*, will open your eyes and your heart to new ways to read and pray and meditate on Scripture.

“My commitment, however, is to the reality of Jesus as a God experience, not the reality of the traditional explanations,” he says, to center his faith in Jesus, which has led him toward a new humanity.

If you missed meeting Bishop Spong and his lovely wife, Christine Mart Spong, in Austin, look for them on book tours and the more than 200 public lectures he gives annually. Read and discuss his writings and glimpse the heart and soul of a pilgrim bishop struggling to rescue religion from the irrelevance of fundamentalism.

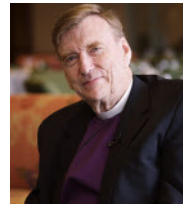
Give yourself the opportunity to come to know and dialogue with this pilgrim bishop. As Kathleen Sullivan (CBS Television) once quipped after an interview with Bishop Spong: “I wish we had bishops like you in my church.”

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## On Spending Three Days with DignityUSA

By Bishop John Shelby Spong with permission

“My name is Sam Sinnett and I am a gay Catholic.” These words, reminiscent of the way members introduce themselves at AA meetings, opened a luncheon at a gathering of DignityUSA, a national support and advocacy organisation for homosexual members of the Roman Catholic Church. Sinnett, a retired businessman from St. Louis, was completing his four year term as Dignity’s national president. This conference, drawing some 250 delegates from across the United States to Austin, Texas, had assigned themselves the task of charting the future for homosexual people in the Catholic Church. This was not an easy assignment since DignityUSA is treated by the hierarchy of this Church as an embarrassing pariah and instead of any recognition or support its members are the recipients of enormous Catholic hostility. By Vatican orders, no Roman Catholic Church in America can allow this group to meet on any Catholic property. When Dignity’s leaders picked the Hyatt Hotel in Austin as the gathering place for their national conference, Gary Preuss, a local Dignity leader, as a courtesy, notified the Most Rev. Gregory Aymond, the Catholic Bishop of Austin that they would convene in his See City. The bishop responded with a letter, acknowledging the notification and saying that he would pray for them. There was no word of welcome and neither this bishop nor any of his local Catholic priests made an appearance at the conference. How short the Church sometimes falls in the simple act of showing kindness.



Catholic opposition to homosexuality is so total and unrelenting that any American Catholic priest who says Mass for local Dignity chapters runs the risk of discipline at the hands of his local bishop. Under the auspices of Pope John Paul II, a statement was issued on 30th October, 1986, written by the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, which moved the Roman Catholic Church from benign neglect of gay people into the stance of being a gay oppressor. This “Halloween Letter,” as the gay community refers to it, urged all Catholic bishops to oppose every legislative effort, on every level of government, which sought to provide equal rights under the law for homosexual people. This included not just official Church opposition to gay marriage, civil unions and benefits for domestic partners, but also any ordinance that would make it illegal to discriminate against people in the work place because of their sexual orientation. When Cardinal Ratzinger became Pope Benedict XVI, one of his first acts was to announce his intention to purge gay males from the ranks of the Catholic priesthood. When the fine print was read, however, he limited himself to preventing aggressive or militant homosexual advocates from becoming priests. Even this Pope knew full well that a purge of gay men from the ranks of the Catholic priesthood would decimate the clergy, to say nothing of culling significantly the members of the College of Cardinals, the archbishops and bishops of that Church. The duplicity and dishonesty surrounding this issue in the Roman Catholic Church is breathtaking.

Despite this hostility, these gay Catholics still express genuine love for their Church and work tirelessly for the change that will enable them to find in their Church a place of welcome. They strive to demonstrate their loyalty to the worship tradition into which most of them were baptised. DignityUSA gathers in local chapters all across America and convenes its National Convention once every two years, to nurse the wounds of gay Catholics, to educate and inspire their members and to make people aware of their gay presence inside their beloved Church.

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*On Spending Three Days with DignityUSA  
Continued from page 4*

Because the members of Dignity know rejection first hand, they have developed a far more accepting and ecumenical understanding of Christianity than that which is official in Catholicism. Since their chapters, of necessity, are required to meet in non-Catholic churches, ties of friendship have tempered traditional exclusive claims. Dignity members understand what Catholic women have endured. In Dignity's closing Eucharist, women were vested with priestly stoles while serving as full participants and co-presiders over the liturgy. These women's hands were raised as they joined with a [*non-diocesan*] priest to bless the bread and the wine and to utter the words of consecration. Catholic rules were clearly being bent here, but the presence of an ordained priest, whose security lay in that he was answerable only to the head of his order not a local bishop, nonetheless guaranteed the "validity" of the Sacrament.

I was invited to this gathering to give the keynote address, to conduct two workshops and to lead the assembly in a brief liturgy of installing, blessing and dedicating their newly-elected officers for the next [two] years. I was also present to listen as they recounted their struggles against their rejection by the Church they love. In the course of these three days I found myself counselling some on vocational decisions, asking God's blessing on some of their committed unions, laying my hands in prayer on one who had just received a serious, perhaps fatal, diagnosis and sharing with this incredible group of men and women their study, worship, eating, dancing and leisure. It was one of the greatest assignments of my life.

This conference offered a number of workshops on such topics as: "Science Meeting Spirituality," "The Revolutionary Nature of Early Oriental Christianity," "A Gay Man's Guide to Prostate Cancer," and "Challenging Hierarchical Structures." Among the workshop leaders were three people whose names might be recognised outside the borders of gay Catholicism. One was the Rev. John J. McNeill, a former Jesuit priest and scholar, whose book "The Church and the Homosexual" was authorised for publication in 1976 only after a three-year delay for study by the Vatican. That authorisation was then removed in 1978. McNeill was among the first voices from within the Christian Church to challenge the Church's attitudes toward homosexuals, refuting that position with scientific, psychological and biblical scholarship. McNeill shattered the inadequate and prejudiced definition that upheld the Church's prejudice. All prejudices die when the definition on which the prejudice is based is challenged. That was true in the battle against racism and in the battle for the equality of women.

McNeill cited new data from science, brain studies and medicine that destroyed the foundations of homophobia and started its inevitable retreat into death. It was thus a seminal book, which opened the heretofore closed ecclesiastical closets and offered incontrovertible evidence that homosexuality is now and always has been a major part of the Catholic priesthood. For most people in the early 70s this was a startling idea. In an interview on NBC, Tom Brokaw asked this priest: "Are you gay?" and John McNeill came out of the closet to 30 million viewers. He was expelled from the Jesuit Order at the direction of Cardinal Ratzinger, but his influence has been beyond the Church's power to control. McNeill began to lead conferences across this nation on homosexuality among priests. One of those conferences, held at the Kirkridge Centre in Pennsylvania, drew a married New Jersey Episcopal clergyman who, unknown to his congregation, was wrestling with both his vocation and his sexual identity. His name was Gene Robinson and today he is the openly gay Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire.

A second Dignity workshop leader was Sister Jeannine Gramick, the nun who developed a significant ministry to gay and lesbian people in Baltimore until she was forced to resign from her order by the same Cardinal Ratzinger. A third was Daniel Helminiak, a priest, scholar and noted author, whose books have given hope to thousands of gay and lesbian Christians.

For me, this conference was both humbling and exhilarating. Seldom before have I been so warmly welcomed, fully included and graciously engaged by members of this faith tradition. Seldom have I been so moved by worship as I was at this conference. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church needs to understand that these people are dedicated and committed Catholics who can neither be expelled nor driven away. Dignity's members are not threatening to leave their Church, they are threatening to stay! "This is our Church, too," they say and "the hierarchy cannot define Catholicism in such a way as to exclude us." They live out their Catholic lives in faithfulness, not in order to be troublesome, but to help to bring to Catholicism the inclusion that is called for in the gospel of Jesus. They are confident they will win this struggle for the soul of their Church and are encouraged by the incontrovertible fact that changes in consciousness are never reversed. Inevitably every part of the Christian Church will lay aside its homosexual prejudices and embrace its gay, lesbian, transgender and bi-sexual brothers and sisters as the creation of God, the beloved of Christ and as those empowered to be all that they can be in the Holy Spirit. Benedict XVI is not the voice of the Catholic future; indeed, he will ultimately be little more than a negative footnote in Catholic history.

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*On Spending Three Days with DignityUSA*  
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Every prejudice that is publicly debated is already dying, so this victory is inevitable. Diehard, retrogressive elements in every Christian Church lose ground daily. They will not prevail in this struggle. Christians cannot continue to sing, "Just as I am without one plea, O Lamb of God, I come" and not live out that invitation. The embarrassment of the Christian Church in our time will not result from the feared split over homosexuality; it will result rather from those Christian leaders who continue to value unity and institutional peace over truth and justice. Those are the people destined to discover that they do not, cannot and will not own the future. That future will belong to DignityUSA, to John McNeill, Sister Jeannine, Daniel Helminiak and their counterparts in every Christian tradition, who act without fear to make the Christian Church whole and to call it to be a sign of the Kingdom of God in our divided world. Indeed we live today at the dawn of a new era.

- John Shelby Spong

*Editor's Note: This article first appeared on "The Weekly Discussion with Bishop John Shelby Spong" on July 18, 2007, <http://www.johnshelbyspong.com>.*

For more information on Bishop Spong, or to read more of his weekly essays, please visit <http://www.johnshelbyspong.com>.

## On DignityUSA and Convention 2007

By John J. McNeill with permission

I think I am one of very few persons who have had the privilege of attending every one of the 18 biennial National Dignity conventions over the past 36 years. (With one exception: the Vatican forbade me to speak at the Chicago convention in 1977. So I sent an open letter on my silencing read by Robert Carter, S.J.). There were many spirit-filled moments, but nothing equaled the miracle that occurred at the National Dignity convention in Austin July 5-8, 2007.



My concern over DignityUSA's future began when I heard that no one had been found who was willing to run for the office of president. I had read Mark Matson's very insightful analysis of the condition of DignityUSA – chapters closing down, declining members, and despair over any hope of dialogue with the church hierarchy, especially after the election of our arch-enemy, Cardinal Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI. One of his first actions was to exclude all healthy self-accepting gays from priesthood but would allow our sick brothers who hate their gayness to go on to ordination.

Many of our former members have given up in despair with the institutional church and have moved on to other communities or to secular pursuits of justice and equality. God bless them all. It has become obvious that the hierarchical church has slammed shut any door to dialogue or positive understanding of its gay and lesbian brothers and sisters. The last straw was the document issued by the American bishops for pastoral ministry to gay and lesbians. This document was issued once again without any dialogue with the gay members of the church. The message was that we who are gay, in order to be acceptable to the church, must internalize self-hatred and remain in the closet.

Then the news reached me that the board of DignityUSA could find no one willing to run as president. The 18th National Convention would probably be our last. Even Mark Matson had declined to run. So the Spirit moved me to call Mark. We had a long talk and, after prayer, reflection and consultation, Mark accepted the task of becoming our next president. And then Lourdes Rodrigues-Nogues of Boston accepted the role of Vice President.

When I arrived at the DignityUSA convention it felt like Good Friday, but by Sunday morning breakfast and Mark Matson's acceptance speech it was Easter Sunday. The presence and action of the Holy Spirit was astonishing. Bishop Spong's keynote speech hit just the right note of hope and confidence in the future role of DignityUSA. Bishop Spong wrote an incredible article: "On Spending Three Days with DignityUSA" in his newsletter *A New Christianity in a New World* which every member should read. [*Editor's Note: a copy of the article begins on page 5 of this publication.*] At the opening ceremony, Brendan Fay played a trailer of my documentary *Uncommon Jesuit*. My personal history coincides with the history of DignityUSA. The audience responded to the trailer with great enthusiasm. We also saw an excellent montage of pictures from our previous convention in Philadelphia, PA.

Throughout the convention, the workshops brought message after message of hope and encouragement for DignityUSA's role in the future church. The liturgies were the highlight, bringing an intense experience of the presence of God in our midst by way of prayer and worship. This is what the whole world hungers for – an experience of God's loving presence.

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*On DignityUSA and Convention 2007*  
*Continued from page 6*

The donor's luncheon was also an incredible event. Mark and Lourdes pointed out that the new DignityUSA needed competent national leaders. Peggy Burns agreed to serve as Office Manager. A well-qualified candidate has been identified for the position of Executive Director. They said we needed to raise \$100,000 for salaries and benefits of an Executive Director – a seemingly impossible sum. However, by the time the luncheon was over, we had commitments of over \$80,000.

The final touch was Mark's acceptance speech at the Sunday brunch. It is my understanding that Mark and Lourdes, in consultation with the National Board, intend to cease to expend any energy on seeking acceptance or acknowledgment from the hierarchy and will focus on giving ourselves over to our positive task of bringing the message of God's love to our lesbian and gay brothers and sisters. We will continue to love the church and pray for it, but no longer waste any energy in trying to change an institution that is not listening. The church is in the hands of God. Our task is the positive one of reaching out in the name of the Spirit to our gay brothers and sisters and those who love and care for them. So we left Austin with a superb set of new leaders and a new understanding of what God wants from us. Like the disciples of Emmaus' "...our hearts were burning within us," a sure sign of the Spirit's presence. We are certain that DignityUSA represents the future Catholic Church at its very best.

John J McNeill

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## Leadership Day, July 5, 2007

By Peggy Burns, DignityUSA Vice-President

Called to think outside the box, 45 members of DignityUSA arrived in Austin on Thursday, July 5, 2007, to attend the Leadership Day, which was held prior to the official start of the 2007 Convention. Members decided to come to see what other chapters are doing to make liturgy more meaningful for their members. They also came to learn how they might create meaningful liturgy in an inclusive environment in their own chapters.



The day's agenda included listening to a panel, consisting of Kathy Ann Gianino, John Keeley, Dick Young and Rosemary Ananis. They shared what they do in their communities to help create a safe, welcoming atmosphere for all members. Following the panel presentation, members split into small groups to answer questions ranging from inclusive language, music selections, ordination and lay presiders. Reporting back to the whole group wrapped up the morning session.

After lunch, members were asked to share a quote, song lyric, a prayer, or whatever they wished, something that would show how little things have been spiritually inspiring to them. Ideas ranged from hearing about healing services, different ways of sharing the sign of peace, celebrating birthdays and anniversaries, what to do with the children in the community and many more.

The fact that nineteen chapters were represented is one indication that the Leadership Day was a success. The folks who attended now have the task of going home to implement some of the suggestions heard during the day.

Judging from the evaluations, which ranged from "good" to "great," and comments like, "Glad I attended, very worthwhile;" "It was more than I expected!;" "The small group sessions were very informative;" "Today's session was a springboard for building our Dignity communities through liturgy;" "Too short in duration." Such comments truly told the board that the topic was necessary and relevant. All who attended really went away happy and rejuvenated.

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## Notes on Three Workshops

By Victor Kralisz, Dignity/Dallas

One of the many reasons for attending a DignityUSA national convention is the exposure to a wide variety of topics offered in the two days of workshops. This year's crop did not disappoint. Whether looking for new perspectives on personal spirituality or better ways to participate in liturgy or increased awareness of the role of scripture in our lives, there was enough variety presented to meet the needs of most of those attending.

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*Notes on Three Workshops*  
*Continued from page 7*

Lynn Bauman presented a fascinating outline of how the wisdom literature of the ancient church is able to be incorporated into the spiritual lives of 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians. 20<sup>th</sup> Century discoveries of “lost gospels” in desert places have led to a new interest in the suppressed writings of the early Church. Dr. Bauman’s perspective on the role of these texts was engaging, since rather than looking at them as unofficial or relegated documents, he placed them in historical and human contexts that show how they have value today if understood in their place in context. If we equate the Gospel of Mark with that of Thomas we miss the unique role that each plays in the revelation of who Jesus is. Thomas illustrates the wisdom teachings of Jesus without the narrative we come to expect from gospel literature.

Mark Jordan has taught and explored the questions surrounding “queer” liturgy for years and presented a thought-provoking way of looking at the rites we celebrate as Christians, as human beings and as queer people. Rituals and sacraments take place in all the places of our lives, not just in church. But the rituals and sacraments we experience in church can be informed with a queer sensibility if we understand enough about who we are and what we do. Dr. Jordan’s contention is that camp, the subversive force that shows our resistance to power in ways that both imitate and subvert, can lead to deeper thinking of ways to make our natures appear in our ritual activity. Those who fear change and those who protect the institutional church will not admit to the validity of any of this. So this activity will not be easily understood. But our own authenticity as queer people will need this test to begin a richer spiritual and liturgical experience.

Daniel Helminiak challenged his audiences with a dizzyingly fast romp through the spiritual dimension of sexual experiences and their relation to us as gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons. The threefold dimension of body, mind (psyche) and spirit relate to three different and important ways of viewing sexual lives. From the body’s need for release to the mind’s need for connection, to the spirit’s need for full-blown intimacy and caring, there is a hierarchy that we so often fail to recognize. But we can indeed recognize the hierarchy as the use of the sexual plays itself out in our lives and as we discover that only in the true interpersonal connection do we find the growth and satisfaction that our hearts yearn for and our bodies need.

These are meager synopses, gathered at too great a speed to do justice. They are presented as facets of a convention that truly fed many different needs and longings for information and guidance. Gratitude goes out to the planners of this convention in bringing us these and so many more invigorating workshops.

## Liturgy for Commissioning and Installation of President and Vice-President Elect

By *George M. Wetzel, Dignity/Houston*

Bishop John Shelby Spong led the assembly during the Convention 2007 liturgy for the commissioning and installation of Mark Matson, President-elect and Lourdes Rodriguez-Nogues, Vice-President-elect.

- Bishop Spong:** In the name of God, I challenge you to do three things:
1. Be as deeply faithful to your church as possible
    - Be an involved, constant presence. Never threaten to leave; threaten only to stay.
    - Be visible, never hidden.
    - Be bold, never hesitant.
  2. Be critical, challenging.
    - A church can never cease to change and grow unless it dies.
    - Everything living is in flux.
    - Only dead things or inert things are unchanging.
  3. Be hopeful.
    - Pope John XXIIIs can arise in the Vatican. It has happened before; it will happen again.
    - Sometimes it is darkest before the dawn.
    - Sometimes a nation or a church elects to leadership one who represents its fear, not its future."

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*Liturgy for Commissioning and Installation of President and Vice-President Elect  
Continued from page 8*

- Bishop Spong:** You are commissioned to be a light in the world’s darkness, and when the church lives in the world’s darkness, you are to be a light in the church’s darkness — a bit of salt in the church’s soup; a leaven in the church’s lump.
- Bishop Spong:** Mark, Lourdes: Do you accept the responsibilities of the office to which you have been elected?
- Mark & Lourdes:** Yes, we do.
- Bishop Spong:** Will you be faithful and diligent in the carrying out of your duties of leadership?
- Mark & Lourdes:** Yes, we will.
- All:** Mark, Lourdes: We commission you to represent us in the leadership of DignityUSA.
- Bishop Spong:** God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit,  
Bless you, strengthen you, and energize you to do the work you been asked to do.
- All:** Amen.

## Defenders of Dignity Report

By Thomas Gregorios, National Coordinator



After a four-year hiatus, Defenders were prominently on the agenda at the DignityUSA Austin convention. Defenders of Dignity, consisting of five leather clubs across the country, is Dignity’s outreach to the leather-levi-kink communities and the leather communities’ in-reach to Dignity. Defenders members continue to play prominent roles in Dignity at the national level and in local Dignity chapters. This year’s convention marked the 25th anniversary of the founding of Defenders of Dignity.

The Defenders-sponsored Mass, organized by Defenders/Ohio, drew 29 participants at 7:00 a.m. Friday. Many attended the bar night, held at the Chain Drive, a suitably seamy traditional local leather bar, with an idyllic rear garden. Defenders/San Francisco organized two excellent workshops: one a general introduction to leather, Defenders and leather spirituality; the other a panel of men sharing the depth of their experience of leather as a spiritual path.

Defenders, at their biennial national business meeting, or conclave, announced the winner of the Michael Oliveri Award, named in honor of its founder. The award will be presented to Bernie Burns of Washington, D.C., recognizing many years of outstanding service to DignityUSA and the Defenders.

Steve Ward (Defenders/San Francisco) made a presentation on how the San Francisco club has been successful in maintaining a strong spiritual focus in its meetings and activities.

The members of Defenders clubs present at the national business meeting voted to join and support the CARAS project. CARAS is a national effort — under the leadership of Defenders/San Francisco member, psychologist Richard Spratt — to coordinate and promote serious academic scholarly research on the leather and kink communities, in cooperation with and in a way that gives back to those communities.

Bill Baird (Defenders/San Francisco) made a presentation on the results of a study undertaken by a special committee, appointed at the last conclave in Philadelphia, charged with examining ways to integrate persons interested in becoming Defenders who are not geographically close to one of the existing five clubs. The concept of a nation-wide chapter was put on hold.

National Coordinator Thomas Gregorios (Defenders/Chicago) outlined efforts to reach potential new members, including developing a post card to be widely distributed to leather businesses, and regularly submitting news items in *The Leather Journal*, both the print version and online version (<http://www.theleatherjournal.com>).

Thomas Gregorios was re-elected National Coordinator for another two-year term by hearty applause. Near the conclusion of the conclave, Defenders gathered around Mark Matson to ask the Lord’s blessing on his new ministry as in-coming president of DignityUSA.

For more information on the Defenders go to <http://www.dignityusa.org/defenders/index/html>.

The **QV** (*Quarterly Voice*) is a publication of DignityUSA. It supplements DignityUSA's **DATELINE**, a monthly newsletter, as well as special news releases issued from time to time. Special editions of **QV** are distributed in hardcopy once or twice a year; other times in electronic format to persons on the Dignity News-List-Serve.

The **DATELINE** is distributed to persons on the Dignity News-List-Serve in electronic format ONLY. Sign up at <http://lists.dignityusa.org/mailman/listinfo/dusa-news>.

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 non-profit organization whose national office is located in Washington, DC, with chapters located throughout the United States.

Members gather at periodic regional meetings and biennial national conventions.

In addition to certain news items, **QV** encourages the exchange of views, book reviews, reflections, noteworthy reports from chapters and other items, especially personal experiences and what has worked well in such areas as pastoral ministry, human and social justice issues, leadership, chapter building and the like.

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

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DVD Editor for Bishop Spong Speech Needed!

By Leo Egashira

Several of you who heard Bishop John Shelby Spong's keynote address at the Austin Convention wrote me asking for a transcript of his speech. Since Bishop Spong speaks from notes, no authorized, printable transcript exists. However, two DignityUSA members, sitting in opposite corners of the room, did videotape his speech using two different formats. DignityUSA is looking for a high tech-savvy person who would be able to splice tapes, enhance audio quality and ultimately edit and produce a DVD of the speech. This DVD, if successfully produced, would then be made available to DignityUSA members and chapters. If you can assist in this project, please contact Leo Egashira: [Legashira@yahoo.com](mailto:Legashira@yahoo.com).

DIGNITYUSA EXECUTIVE ADDRESSES AT CONVENTION 2007

Address by Sam Sinnett, President

Given at Luncheon, July 6, 2007

Good afternoon, DignityUSA !

Peggy Burns' and my two-term, four-year period as Vice-President and President of DignityUSA is winding down and ends September 30, with our new officers and a new Board of Directors taking over October 1, 2007. It's been a long and eventful journey from our Las Vegas convention through Philadelphia to here in Austin.

In a slightly humorous vein, the last four years can be summed up as two Popes and two Executive Directors. Much has gone on in our Church and within our organization. The old Chinese blessing or curse is that one lives in "interesting times," so I guess we have been much "blessed!"



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Let me talk first about some highlights within our organization.

DignityUSA's mission is to work for respect and justice for all gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy and support. Much work to advance our great mission has gone on over the last four years, and certainly since I last spoke to you in Philadelphia two years ago.

DignityUSA is the Voice of GLBT Catholics and our families and friends in our Church and in society and the world. For various reasons, many of our members and other GLBT Catholics cannot speak for themselves. So if we don't speak, who will? Our marvelous website archives an astounding 73 different press releases, statements and other instances of "Dignity in the News" in the past four years. We have spoken out or been sought out by the media on a wide range of topics, including:

1. Bishops' refusal of Baptism, Communion and even the Rite of Christian burial to members of the GLBT Catholic community
  2. Same-sex marriage and other forms of support for our commitments, in various US states, Canada and Europe
  3. Attempts to exclude gay candidates from seminaries
  4. Adoption of children by same-sex couples
  5. Bishop Gumbleton's forced retirement
  6. The Papal transition
- and many others.

Imagine how many millions of people have heard our Voice presenting a positive, faith-based, holistic perspective on the lives and gifts of GLBT Catholics and our families.

In addition, we have compiled an amazing archive of the weekly Breath of the Spirit homilies, the monthly *Datelines* and the quarterly *QVs*. We also commissioned Catholic theologian Patricia Beatty Jung to write the excellent theological paper *The Call to Wed: Why Catholics Should Celebrate Same-Sex Marriage*. This and numerous other such resources are on our website for all to see including some excellent ones last year related to the ex-gay movement to cure homosexuality.

There is astounding depth and breadth to our communications. We even had one state legislator tell us our web postings influenced her vote in support of civil unions. She wrote:

*Dear DignityUSA:*

*As I approach a civil unions vote in tomorrow's legislative session I was so encouraged as a Catholic legislator to find your site and read such intelligent discourse.*

*I have heard direct from the pulpit and in emails from my priests urging me to vote against the bill.*

*How many ways can our Church exclude loving people?*

*Thank you for your work.*

*Rep. Eileen Flockhart  
Exeter, NH*

We have continued working with our allies both in the progressive Catholic communities and in other LGBT spiritual and political groups over these last few years. As a result, we have seen greater willingness among progressive Catholic leaders to speak out on issues of importance to us, and increased understanding of the needs and contributions of GLBT Catholics in the greater movement for equality. I am very proud of the respect we have among our allies in both of these networks.

This weekend we are proudly releasing our updated Pastoral Care Guidelines for GLBT Catholics. Much of our media work is necessarily reactive so this type of proactive accomplishment is something we take great pride in. I hope you share that pride. The draft of our Guidelines was issued during last November's US Conference of Catholic Bishops meeting in response to the atrocious guidelines put out by our US Bishops without consultation with either GLBT Catholics or those the bishops themselves assign to

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*Address by Sam Sinnett, President  
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minister to us. Because of years of persistent activity and cooperation with our Catholic Organization for Renewal (COR) allies, this coalition put out its own impassioned plea for our bishops to not issue that statement. That month the DignityUSA Voice was heard in hundreds of newspaper articles with over a thousand Google hits, through dozens of interviews and several radio and television broadcasts. The high regard the media has for the honesty and integrity of the DignityUSA Voice allowed us to be heard speaking the truth of our lived experience to literally millions of people around the world. Such media exposure is priceless. If we don't speak, who will? There simply is no other comparable Voice. It is truly GREAT !

Of course, over these last four years, we've experienced some challenges, as well.

Peggy and I came to you initially with the vision to Amplify the Voice with growing membership and to Empower the Voice with greater fundraising. Initially the membership grew from 1,900 to well over 3,000 — with a big chunk of support from Catholic friends at Call to Action and from younger gay & lesbian activists at The National Gay & Lesbian Task Force's (NGLTF's) Creating Change conference, but we could not unlock the secret to persuade most of the new members to support us financially.

Today our membership is over 2,400, but our donor base has continued to shrink as it has done for the past 25 years. Your Board of Directors continues to struggle to come up with a formula for raising the funds we need. Today we only have about 1,000 donors and only 700 who donate more than \$50 per year. The standard non-profit rule that 20% of donors contribute 80% of revenue is even more skewed for us. Far less than 20%, only 50 organizations and individuals, contribute 50% of our income; that's 50 people out of 1,000 donors or 50 people out of 2,500 members. As much as we thank God for those 50 donors (and all our donors) this is quite shocking and is neither healthy nor sustainable for an organization that has as ambitious an agenda as DignityUSAs.

Discerning what the answer is for our fundraising needs is very much a work in progress and undoubtedly new and creative ideas will come forward to answer that question. Perhaps you have the key? One cannot know for sure what external forces like the election of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI have done to our membership and donor levels. But we do know this has been a tough period for progressive Catholic organizations in general. Regardless, we need to live and plan for the future in the here and now.

There are two things you can do: Our monthly Guardian Angel donors take good advantage of our secure online credit card system and we need many more of our members — every one of you here today — to join in and give us the \$21 or \$42 or \$84 monthly donations that we need to sustain our existence. Don't leave Austin without signing up! The second thing for you to do is to specifically mention DignityUSA in your will or life insurance as a living testament of the value of the work our very existence can be for future generations.

As some of you know, I recently dodged a bullet with the successful removal of a surface skin cancer melanoma. DignityUSA has dodged the bullet of dropping revenues. Today our expense budgets have been slashed extensively — by over 40 % — to meet the revenue our members contribute. A tremendous amount of our work is done by volunteers, but realistically there is a need for paid staff. Except for a few large and largely non-repeatable donations, our membership over the past several years has not contributed enough revenue for us to fully pay for an Executive Director. Yet officers and other Board members, as part-time volunteers scattered across the country, cannot be expected to do all that needs to be done.

What is the answer? Today our Board meets in person three times a year and monthly by teleconference calls — all of which cost this organization nothing because Board members now pay all of their own expenses. Potential Board members without sufficient personal resources need a chapter or others to sponsor them. All Board members have fundraising responsibilities. This past year, the Board has operated without an Executive Director and has moved our office to much less expensive space in Dignity/Washington's Dignity Center. We have struggled to find the caliber of staff we need to operate, and the Board has recently decided to hire a new Office Manager. Beginning October 1, our very own Peggy Burns will begin running our office, operating out of her home town of Boston. We will maintain our headquarters in Washington, DC, but go to where the best talent is to staff our operations.

These decisions exemplify the work of our recent and incoming boards, which are wide open to new ideas and new solutions. We have been blessed with more and more people with the specific talents that a Board of Directors needs. Our Board operations have been vastly improved, guided now by Strategic Planning which was in its infancy for us just four years ago. We are always in need of volunteers to do the work of the Board and of our essential Board committees. Obviously our best source for volunteers may be right here in this room and with our other passionate supporters who hopefully will read these words in the coming days on our website [and in this publication].

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*Address by Sam Sinnett, President  
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Many of you were involved in the Re-Imaging Dignity process that developed during the 1990's and was finalized in 2001 with new bylaws and the resulting structural changes. Part of our overall work of the past four years has been to facilitate the transition to what that restructuring process envisioned. A major part of that vision was a different type of Board of Directors that was to be a working, stewardship-focused, administrative, policy-making body that pulls diverse people in from around the country to expand the resources dedicated to running the organization. This is a huge cultural transformation that had to honor our first 30+ years of history and tradition but fundamentally change the way we think and do things. In many ways this has been done, even if usually done quietly and without a lot of fanfare. It really is the completion of the restructuring process launched in New Orleans in 1993 when I was just struggling to find my local Dignity chapter in St. Louis and come out as a gay Catholic. Hopefully this is a legacy – **the** legacy – that will be the absolutely critical under-pinning in moving our great Mission forward for years to come.

Within DignityUSA much has been tried and accomplished in the past four years; much remains to do. GLBT religious groups are becoming increasingly important to the success of our movement for full equality. There is a tremendous need for positive GLBT Catholic theology and pastoral practice based in the realities of our faith and experiences. There still needs to be a Voice that will speak truth to power, and speak when the powerful do not speak truth. We know how to do all of this. We, DignityUSA, can do all of this. With your help we can survive and thrive! Without your help, who knows what the future holds?

Whether responding to legislative issues such as same-sex marriage in many of the states where we have DignityUSA chapters or to the homophobic “truthiness” of the Vatican or to the election of a new pope or to a private e-mail from someone hurting or damaged, DignityUSA has been available to respond. Thanks for making that possible!

Let me close with these final remarks.

Hopefully all of this is worthy of your continued prayers, involvement and support. I once again stand humbly before you in all my human frailty. There is no way Peggy and I could ever thank everyone for all they've done – all you've done – for DignityUSA over the past four years. You are a passionate and loving people and it's been a great privilege to serve DignityUSA as your officers.

Thank you for being here with us this weekend. Let's go forth from here energized, using our time here in Austin as a family to listen, to pray, to play, and to work hard together. Then let's take that energy home with us to our chapters or other faith communities, with renewed support for the national mission of DignityUSA. Give all the support you can to Mark, Lourdes, and the Board that will lead this organization for the next couple of years. And then let's gather again, stronger, more vibrant and even more successful than ever, in San Francisco in 2009 for our 40th Anniversary!

God Bless all of you, all those you love and all of DignityUSA !

**Address by Mark Matson, President-elect**

*Given at Sunday Brunch, July 8, 2007*

In the name of the Creator, Word & Spirit.

When our Liturgy began last night, I was seated in the 3rd row center, with my life partner, Chris, on my right, good friends around me, a room filled with voices of loving hearts and four celebrants on the stage called from our midst: Two women and two men. And I thought - this is my Catholic tradition at its best! This is a Church I can believe in!



It's been a long journey to this day. I'd like to tell you a story to give you a better sense of the path that has led me to stand before you today as your next President.

I first faced the truth of my sexual orientation in the very place I had gone to run away from it: the seminary. Up till then I KNEW my body was not functioning the way it should have. I had learned about homosexuality in my Catholic Catechism and my 7th grade sex education class. One thing I knew was that I could not act on my body's powerful urges, and there was not a bisexual inclination in me, so marriage did not seem to be an option. So surprise, surprise, I concluded I must be called to priesthood! I joined

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*Address by Mark Matson, President-elect  
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a religious community called the Paulists. It was in their novitiate, ironically, that I found 13 other men just like me! And for the first time, at age 24, I fell in love. Letting my guard down and allowing myself to be touched and held intimately was one of the most grace-filled experiences of my life. I KNEW that this incredible experience of love could not be evil. My first love, Michael, left the community after the first year. I decided to stay. But our love only grew in separation. Finally, my spiritual advisor told me I needed to decide. I was really torn because I think I did have a calling to priesthood. One night I went to the Chapel to pray for guidance: “Tell me God, what you want of me.” In one of few such occasions in my life, I believe I heard the voice of God clearly: “I don’t care what you do Mark. I don’t care if you are a priest, plumber, policeman, politician or pediatrician. All I care about is how well you love others when you are doing it.” I knew then that I would never be a good priest if I didn’t pursue this opportunity to find out how to give and receive love.

So I left and moved from Washington, D.C. to start a new life with Michael in Columbus, Ohio. About a year later, I flew home to Denver to see my parents with a mission. They were getting older I wanted them to really know me. I agonized over how and when to reveal my secret to my very Irish Catholic mother ... who said the rosary every day, attended Mass every morning, washed and pressed the church linens, watched Sissy and Bobby perform on *Lawrence Welk* and who was scandalized by *All in the Family*. I had to tell Mary Jane that her best-behaved youngest son, the only son who had remained in the Church, had abandoned plans to become a priest in order to pursue a lover and set up house!

I procrastinated until the end of my week’s visit. The pressure was on. My last night there, we drove over to my aunt’s place for dinner; that would be a convent of the Sisters of Charity–Cincinnati. On the way, we stopped at a traffic light. I was in the back seat and I heard my mother say,

“Clifford - look at that young man in the car next to us.”

“Yes?”

“He’s wearing an earring. I see that more and more often. What is that about?”

My dad said wisely, from his scanning of Readers Digest, “Oh yes, I remember reading about that. I think that means he’s a lesbian.”

O Christ, I thought - I am going to have to tell them I’m a lesbian!

You laugh because you get the joke. You get it on so many levels – many nuances that people outside our tribe do not get. I came to Austin for the same reasons I came to Philadelphia, and Chicago, and Denver, and Boston – to be with my tribe. Kindred spirits. Soul mates. Over the past ten years I have come to know a good number of you. We’ve spent good time together — debating, praying, thinking, fretting, mourning, celebrating, listening, and healing. Being Eucharist for one another. Dignity – my chapter and national – put wind back in sails tattered by the persistent spiritual and psychological abuse of a well-intentioned but fundamentally flawed theology of sexuality. Dignity restored my dignity. I am deeply grateful. I have come to be proud of who I am. And I remain proud of my very rich Catholic heritage. I refuse to let it go – to yield ground to teachings on human sexuality from a celibate hierarchy. I am wiser for my pain and struggles. And now I guess I, along with Lourdes, am called to apply that wisdom in service to you as President and Vice President of DignityUSA.

The call came over a year ago when Sam and Peggy asked me if I would consider this position. Honestly, my first response was dread. I was recovering from professional burnout. I had just completed a major career transition and was once again enjoying balance in my life. I was growing increasingly weary of doing battle with the hierarchy. I just wanted time to watch *American Idol* like the rest of America. I thought about it over six months. The sense of burden never lifted. I interpreted the lack of enthusiasm as a sign this call was not from God. So I said no. I said “no” again four months later after a national search failed to turn up any candidates. And yet here I am. What happened?

It was not guilt – the favored Catholic tradition. Three things happened:

- The Board restructured the position of President by breaking it into four parts. Jeff Stone of Dignity/New York, stepped forward to take on responsibility for media relations. Tom Yates of Dignity/Washington, D.C., stepped forward to take on responsibility for managing our office operations. This lightened the load considerably. I felt I had the gift and passion for what remained – serving as a legal figurehead and directing the work of the Board.

- I wrote a sobering assessment of the state of affairs in Dignity that was distributed to the membership. We heard back from all kinds of people. And the response told me there was life and energy out there. And a will to change - once again.

- Then John McNeill contacted me. He told me he thought I had the right take on our challenges and the right vision for the time. But most important, he told me not to think of this as a job in which I was responsible for fixing Dignity or fixing the Church. He

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*Address by Mark Matson, President-elect  
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encouraged me to accept where things are as part of a larger plan, bring what I can to the table and have faith that God will provide the rest. In other words, he reminded me that this was not about me. I had been loved well by this community and this was an opportunity to give love back.

The heaviness of the role lifted quickly and energy took its place. Enthusiasm. You know, the word “enthusiasm” comes from the Greek “en theos” – “in God.” That enthusiasm told me the time to step forward and serve was now right for me.

I think Dignity and I are at similar places in our life paths. In my 30s, I was taking on the world – optimistic and idealistic. In my 40s, I gave lots of energy to setting and pursuing goals, proving my competence, changing things in the conviction that I could make a difference. And I did make a difference. As has Dignity!

But my success seduced me into thinking change depended on me. That **I** was the active agent. It was up to me. I’m embarrassed to say it, but it was kind of Messianic in a way. This was like Dignity in its adolescence and early adulthood — out to change the Church with the conviction that it all depended on us.

Then I encountered limits and experienced failure. My response? Try harder. Do what worked before. But the old behaviors were no longer working. Like the dynamic in any co-dependent relationship, I was not smart enough to realize the futility of my efforts until I moved into considerable depression, anxiety and finally full-blown depression. I finally came to grips with the fact there were things and people in life I could not control.

I sense a similar source of depression in Dignity. We have worked so hard. We see all kinds of positive change around us, but our beloved Catholic Church is behaving worse, not better! We have experienced failure and disillusionment and the resentment and anger that come with that.

But, as is central to our faith, loss and failure is a portal to liberation. When we let go of the illusion we can make the Church be something she does not want to be; when we cease trying to control the Bishops – they cease controlling us. Resentments enslave us. Forgiveness frees us. If you have not already done so, free yourself, forgive the hierarchy, for they know not what they do.

Now I have crossed the threshold into my 50s. And funny thing – I don’t have the energy I used to have. I realize I am not as invincible or resilient. But I am wiser. I have finally learned the truth of the Serenity Prayer — to be more realistic in my expectations, to set priorities and channel my more limited energy on the things that count most. I’ve learned to be at peace with who I am.

And I believe that is similar to the place we are coming to. I personally do not intend to invest any more energy in trying to secure the approval of the bishops.

Dignity – national and local – needs to channel our limited resources where they will do the most good — which is living Christ-centered lives, feeding our spirits through the rich sacramental tradition of Catholicism, loving well and celebrating our unique capacity for loving as Christ calls us to. We are in the largest Christian Church in the world and still called to be the yeast for change by being true to our God-given nature.

We can and must respond to the hierarchy, but from a place of serenity and confidence, not from defensiveness or anger.

I am well aware that I do not stand before you alone. I am gifted with talent all around me. When I asked Lourdes if she would share this dance with me and she said, “Yes,” I was as thrilled as a schoolboy! “Really?! You really will?!”

Lourdes and I believe this organization has two primary purposes at this time in history. National does one thing well – something no chapter can do alone – pull us together so we can encourage one another and speak in a unified voice to re-present our truth in the public square and in the parish hall. Chapters are called to do what national cannot — place us in community and feed us through the Eucharist, Word and fellowship. We believe deeply that we need one another like yin and yang.

Taking the baton from those who have gone before us, we step into this role with ideas about our future strategy. The membership meeting addressed some significant challenges ahead. We will work to:

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*Address by Mark Matson, President-elect  
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- Address inefficiencies in the national office operations,
- Build our connections with chapters,
- Be the Voice that keeps **connecting the name Dignity continuously with the conviction that we can be both Catholic and gay in the fullest sense of both of those words,**
- Raise money to empower that Voice and conviction. Our financial situation is tenuous, but it is not the first time we have had to move forward with faith as our primary fuel,
- Explore the potential for leveraging our resources through an alliance with a kindred reform organization.

In his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins lays out the results of years of research into what distinguishes truly great organizations from good ones. There was one key finding that is counter-intuitive. The leaders of great organizations first found the right talent and THEN they developed a strategy for success. Not the other way around.

I believe this is true for Dignity. Our success absolutely depends on having the right talent in our national office. Having chaired a national search committee, I have learned how difficult that is for us.

Sam mentioned in his address that the Spirit appears to be at work. In addition to persuading Lourdes and me, She does appear to be assembling a new team for us. When the position of Office Manager opened, our current Board Secretary, Peggy Burns, stepped forward to express interest in the job. She has 20-plus years of demonstrated leadership experience in Dignity, ten of which have been on the National Board. She is a perfect fit for the job. She knows what is needed, what she is getting into, and we trust her. But there is one problem: She is in Boston and the job is in D.C. So, accommodating the Spirit, the Board voted to, once again, move the job to where the right talent is. Did you know our national office has been in L. A., Boston, and San Diego in addition to D.C.? We are thrilled that Peggy will be our new office manager effective October 1st.

Then there was the question of an executive director. The position has been open for nine months now. Sam assumed much of that responsibility. With demanding full-time jobs, Lourdes and I can not do that. At the President's lunch on Friday [July 6, 2007], Sam alluded to an exciting new possibility that I want to inform you about.

[Amidst our conventioners was a member of DignityUSA known to have the credentials of education, skills and proven work experience as an executive director of a non-profit organization and advocate within the GLBT community. Following an exploratory meeting with the current and incoming national board of directors, and an expressed interest and vision by the individual, the Board endorsed the person as the best-qualified candidate for the position of Executive Director.]

But once again, we are presented with a challenge: We do not have the financial means to compensate the candidate appropriately. We need to raise over \$100,000 to provide a just wage to the laborers in our vineyard, including salary, benefits, travel expenses and other operational needs. An intimidating task – but we believe that this candidate and Peggy, along with this Board, and your support, is a dream team. We so believe this is the right thing to do, that we brought the need to our major donor luncheon on Saturday [July 7, 2007]. I am thrilled to tell you that the four dozen people present have pledged \$87,000 for the first year and nearly \$150,000 over three years to help make it happen. But as exciting as that is, we are not at our goal yet. We need you to help make this happen. We must broaden the base of financial support for this organization. The new Board of Directors is presenting you with an opportunity to re-invigorate Dignity. We need you to step up to the plate. If you want to see this happen, please send a donation to DignityUSA earmarked for “Talent Fund.” If this is meant to be – you will be led to do your part!

We also need your prayers and your talent. We'll be informing you of our talent needs. The Board cannot do this alone. We also recognize the needs of our Chapters — whether there or here, we need your support.

Let me start winding this up.

I finally decided to say “yes” to your request to lead Dignity at the Easter service of my Columbus Chapter. One of the readings that day was about the women at the tomb. The women were the first to witness the resurrection. The feminine spirit is always the energy that facilitates new life. Our presider, a woman, reminded us that the tomb is a “liminal” place. “Limina” is the Latin word for the place betwixt and between. Neither here nor there. It is the place of wandering and daily manna. The place of uncertainty. The place that both challenges and invigorates faith. It is the Petri dish the early Church grew in. It is where we are now – again.

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*Address by Mark Matson, President-elect  
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Like the women at the tomb, and the male disciples of Jesus, we are easily daunted, bewildered and ill at ease in that space between yesterday and tomorrow, between life, death, and new life. Liminal space is a place of struggle – a desert in which significant transformation happens. It is when we have left the familiar, but have not yet arrived at the new. It is when we are between our old comfort zone and any possible new way of being. Let us not be persons of the past. Let us be informed by the past, but inspired into the future. We'll lead Dignity through this next chapter of uncertainty, with your prayers, the example of Jesus, and the work of the Spirit.

I close with another story – the story behind my favorite hymn. It wasn't my favorite until I heard the story about the man who wrote *Amazing Grace*.

The hymn was written by a man who ran a slave trade between the colony of Virginia and Africa. The trade had made him a wealthy man. One time when he was at home, he witnessed the birth of his first child. On the very next trip back from Africa he saw one of the slave women give birth. He was so struck by the common humanity of both events, that he ordered the ship to turn around. He freed the slaves in that ship, returned to Virginia, freed his own and became a preacher. *Amazing Grace* is the story of his conversion.

Listen to the words:

“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found; was blind but now I see.

“’Twas Grace that taught my heart to fear and Grace my fears relieved. How precious did that Grace appear the hour I first believed.

“Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come. ’Tis Grace has brought me safe thus far and Grace will lead me home.”

The moral for me is that it is never too late to turn the ship around. These are challenging times for Dignity, but I believe Grace will see us through!

We have been renewed by our reunion, our liturgy, and our faith in the Gospel.

Peace be unto you. If not before, I'll see you for our 40th anniversary in San Francisco!

## Address by Lourdes Rodriguez-Nogués

Given at Major Donor Luncheon, Saturday, July 7, 2007

*Editor's Note: Lourdes refers to Mark Matson's address, which preceded hers at the Major Donor Luncheon. Mark's address was repeated and expanded in his Sunday Brunch address shown above.*

Like a good feminist, Mark has certainly outlined for you his process of decision-making. As many of you sitting in this room know, that moment of accepting a leadership role in DignityUSA does not come without a process of discernment; sometimes an agonizing one, and sometimes just a jump in the water, head first hoping that the water is deep enough not to break your neck. You have all survived it, so why can't I?



As a way of telling you a bit about myself and my process, I have chosen a “famous in the United States” method. The Ten Reasons List.

This is my list.

Why did I agree to serve as Vice-President of Dignity/USA?

10. Because my spouse Diane told me to, and I always do what she says.

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*Address by Lourdes Rodriguez-Nogués  
Continued from page 17*

9. Because Duddy, Hayes, and Burns told me to, and I sometimes do what they say.
8. Because I have a crush on Mark Matson and think he's the cat's meow.
7. Because I love to have a good reason to ask people for money, and ask again, and ask again.
6. Because my dear friend Rich Rasi came to me in a dream and brought me colorful balloons when he heard me say I had to write a homily for a parish I was in charge of.
5. Because I believe.
4. Because I believe that Christ has called Dignity to be church and live the gospel.
3. Because I believe that we have been called as prophets, to tell the truth of our lives as Catholic GLBT people, that others might come to know hope.
2. Because I believe that the work of God's "kingdom" is now and that Dignity has a role in making it real.
1. Because I believe that Dignity gives witness not only to the love that God has for each and every one of her creations; but also to what happens when we are a justice and peace seeking people, creating a table not for a few but for all.

Mark and I offer our love, passion, resources, talents, faith, and hope for Dignity and with Dignity, not because we are perfect, flawless, or have all the answers. But because we have heard the call, because it is our turn to be the leaders of what has been and continues to be a community where God lives and the Spirit is ever-present.

Come join us, not because we say so, but because your loving God expects you to do so.

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## AWARDS PRESENTED AT CONVENTION 2007

### Kevin J. Calegari Leadership Award

**KEVIN CALEGARI** was President of DignityUSA from 1991 to 1993. He was a tireless and passionate leader who brought new levels of visibility to our movement. In the best-known incident from his presidency, Kevin symbolized Dignity's rejection of the Vatican's 1992 Letter "Some Considerations Concerning the Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-discrimination of Homosexual Persons" — in which bishops were instructed to oppose all legislation supportive of equal rights for lesbians and gay men — by writing REJECTED across the front of the document and nailing it to the door of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome. Kevin died of AIDS in 1994.

To honor his memory, and to recognize extraordinary leadership within Dignity as a movement, the Board of Directors of DignityUSA established this award. It is presented biennially to an individual who has demonstrated the same kind of passionate commitment Kevin gave to us.

There were two awardees at the 2007 Convention — Peggy Hayes (Dignity/Boson), presented by Peggy Burns, Vice-President, and Tom Streeper (Dignity/Philadelphia), presented by Mark Matson, President-elect.

**Peggy Hayes** has served on numerous committees on the local, regional and national level, including planning committees for two conventions and two terms on the DignityUSA Board of Directors.

In order to Amplify our voice, we have to speak on behalf of the organization clearly, concisely and with consistency. Most non-profit organizations employ people in the communications and public relations fields to craft these messages. We are fortunate to have dedicated volunteers. As a public relations professional experienced in health care and university settings, Peggy Hayes brings a

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*Kevin J. Calegari Leadership Award  
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particular expertise in helping us as a non-profit organization get our message out. She has crafted press releases, talking points, and ghost written for your national leaders, as well as local leaders, sometimes beyond her local chapter. She has assisted the national office by being a primary press contact when needed, and has tracked articles in newspapers across the country written about or mentioning DignityUSA.

**Tom Streeper** served on the DignityUSA Board of Directors for five years, from 1998-2003. During that time, he served as Chair of the Marketing Committee and contributed to the Fundraising Committee. He was one of the key creators and promoters of the "Angel" program which recognizes donors who commit to a monthly deduction from a credit card. This program helped provide DignityUSA with a more reliable cash flow and encouraged major donor giving by defining giving categories.

Tom organized the first DignityUSA event at Gay Days at Disney World — which provided a fun event that brought Dignity family together and it also raised funds for the organization.

## Michael Bushek Service Award

Named for **MICHAEL BUSHEK**, longtime DignityUSA national newsletter editor, this award is given to an individual who has demonstrated exceptional long-term service to Dignity at the national level. Michael was one of those tireless volunteers that every non-profit organization craves. He spent days combing through chapter newsletters, publications from other gay and Catholic organizations, and the mainstream press for news items of interest to Dignity members. He mercilessly tracked down national officers who owed him stories, and hounded individuals from coast to coast for photographs ("black and white, good quality please"). He published the national newsletter single-handedly for many years.

Upon his death, the national board created this award to honor Michael's memory, and to express gratitude to others who have given a lifetime of service to Dignity.

Award presented by Sam Sinnett, President

**Jim Green and Bill Diederich** have served DignityUSA for over 25 years. They have volunteered at Call to Action, invested money in DignityUSA and made sure that the national office has their support in any way possible. The service these two men give to DignityUSA cannot be counted. They are out there making sure the national board has their vote of confidence, sending the board/officers ideas and suggestions and they never ask for anything in return. Their commitment to DignityUSA makes them worthy of this award.

Bill and Jim are very involved in their local chapter: Integrity-Dignity/Madison (WI). Their awareness of what Dignity as a national organization is about extends to a very deep level, and they try to impart that awareness to recruit new members.

## President's Awards Recipients

Given at President's Luncheon, July 6, 2007

**Bill Welch:** Of San Jose, CA, for dedicated work on DignityUSA's periodicals: the monthly *Dateline* and quarterly *QV*.

**Bart Coyle:** Leader of a young chapter in Sarasota, FL, who is always looking for ways that this chapter can be voice of DignityUSA.

**Tom and Patty Stricker:** Members of Dignity/Columbus (OH). After attending a house party, they became involved and contributed time, treasure and talent.

**Edwards Buice:** Dignity/Chicago (IL) member who took charge of Silent Auctions at the Philadelphia and Austin conventions.

**Dignity/St. Louis Chapter:** Involved in LOGO television documentary, *Be Real*, the story of a young man thrown out of seminary because he was gay introducing his family to DignityUSA.

**Peter Edwards:** Dignity/Washington D.C. member who stepped up and volunteered to help in the office after the office manager resigned.

**Bishop Thomas Gumbleton:** Retired auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Detroit, for his many years of support for DignityUSA and our mission to and for LGBT Catholics and of others marginalized by the Church.

## DIGNITYUSA GUIDELINES FOR PASTORAL CARE OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER (LGBT) PEOPLE 2007

### Preface

In November of 2006, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a document titled *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*.

Although welcomed by the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community as an acknowledgment of the particular spiritual needs of LGBT Catholics, the document failed to address many important concerns of the very people it seeks to assist. Especially distressing was the bishops' self-admitted failure to consult with or seek input from the LGBT community during the formulation of the letter. In addition, rather than welcoming LGBT persons to participate fully in the life of the church, the bishops sought to shame them into invisibility and silence, thus perpetuating longstanding prejudices and discrimination against LGBT people in the church and in society.

The following *DignityUSA Letter on the Pastoral Care of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) People 2007* seeks to address some of the critical pastoral needs of the LGBT community today. It gives voice to the concerns of Catholic LGBT persons regarding their role in the church; calls on the bishops of the United States to put an end to prejudice and discrimination against LGBT people in the church; and expresses the hope, expectation and just demand of LGBT Catholics to be full participants in their church.

### Text

***“By the grace of God I am what I am, and God’s grace to me has not been without effect.”*** (I Corinthians 15:10)

“We believe that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Catholics in our diversity are members of Christ’s mystical body, numbered among the People of God. We have an inherent dignity because God created us, Christ died for us, and the Holy Spirit sanctified us in Baptism, making us temples of the Spirit, and channels through which God’s love becomes visible. Because of this, it is our right, our privilege, and our duty to live the sacramental life of the Church, so that we might become more powerful instruments of God’s love working among all people.”

— *Opening of DignityUSA Statement of Position and Purpose*

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Catholics and their families, like all Catholics, need and deserve pastoral care from ministers and members of the church that is respectful, affirming, challenging and directed towards helping them mature and deepen their commitment to the Gospel. DignityUSA draws on nearly forty years of providing this care for LGBT people, and on the lived experience of thousands of faithful LGBT Catholics, to put forth the following declaration of what this care should encompass.

1. Pastoral care for LGBT Catholics must truly embody and reflect the truth that we are equal in worth and dignity to other people. As children of God, we are created in God’s divine image and likeness, as are all people. We should, therefore, be treated with respect, and be constantly challenged to respect others, especially those unlike us or unfamiliar to us. As individuals and as a community, we deserve the same legal protection of basic human rights enjoyed by other members of the church and of civil society. These include the rights to safe housing, equal opportunity in employment, freedom from physical and verbal violence, immigration, and health care. These rights should not merely be affirmed, but actively supported by leaders and ministers of the church in the arena of public discourse and civil legislation. Efforts to thwart the achievement of these rights should not be championed from the pulpit.

2. LGBT Catholics must be welcomed as full and equal participants in the life of the church. All sacraments and roles of ministry, leadership and service should be open to LGBT Catholics, as they are to other members of the church. Church employees and volunteers must be free of any harassment, discrimination or recrimination due to their gender identity or sexual orientation, regardless of whether that identity or orientation has been publicly disclosed or acknowledged.

3. Ministry to LGBT Catholics and our families must be sensitive to the history of alienation caused by decades of negative statements and actions directed against our community by church officials and ministers. Awareness of the pain and fear of religious institutions carried by many LGBT Catholics and family members, and a willingness to work to regain trust, are essential qualities for all involved in these ministries. LGBT people will need space and time to tell our stories, and to be heard with a sincere openness and willingness to learn about our lives, our relationships, and the relationship between our lives and our faith.

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*DignityUSA Letter on the Pastoral Care of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) People 2007*  
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4. The lives and experiences of LGBT Catholics must be reflected in the liturgical, educational and social events of the church. For too long, the invisibility of LGBT people in church and society has enabled our continued oppression. Maintaining the veil of secrecy leads to isolation, confusion and a sense of shame. It invites those who do not understand us or are hostile to us to dehumanize and pathologize LGBT people, and to view us as threatening and alien. Our lives and experiences must be counted as normal dimensions of God's creation. We must be made visible — for our own sake, and that of the rest of the human family. Rituals that help to sanctify aspects of LGBT people's lives are needed to help ensure that the church is truly welcoming. In addition, special care must be given to prevent the continued marginalization and exclusion of women from full and significant participation in all activities of the church.

5. A revised theology of sexuality must acknowledge that many intimate relationships express unitive love, even in the absence of possible procreation. This must be affirmed as an expression of divine love. The church has long acknowledged that one of the primary functions of the sexual relationship within marriage is the unitive function, which facilitates the development of a bond of love and intimacy between partners. Furthermore, the church sanctions marriage between men and women who have no possibility of procreating, whether by reason of age or infertility. Sexually intimate relationships between same-gender couples must be affirmed as having the same potential for holiness as those between opposite-gender married couples. Guidelines for ethical expression of sexuality are welcome, to the extent that they promote respect, freedom from exploitation, honesty and mature love between partners. It is critical for church ministers, counselors and religious professionals to receive training and theological updating regarding the nature, purpose and development of the sexual relationships of LGBT people.

6. Same-gender partners must have the opportunity to formalize our commitments sacramentally, as well as through civil marriage. Equality in the eyes of God and under the law must be affirmed. LGBT people must have the same access as our heterosexual sisters and brothers to the sacrament of marriage and to legal protections that support and provide public affirmation of our commitments. Church leaders should be in the forefront of advocating for equal recognition of commitments between same-gender partners. The church should not actively work against efforts to obtain the right to civil marriage for LGBT people.

7. Pastoral care for the families of LGBT people — both the families from which we originate, and the families we create — should emphasize respect, ongoing inclusion, love and affirmation, while providing support for the particular struggles that LGBT people and their families undergo. Many parents, grandparents, siblings and extended families find their love for LGBT Catholic family members in conflict with social and religious messages. They struggle to maintain positive relationships with family members who “come out” by disclosing their sexual orientation. The experience of “coming out,” which can be painful as well as graced for all involved, requires compassionate support. Church officials and ministers must urge family members to maintain relationships, offer unconditional respect for one another, and communicate honestly with one another. Church officials and ministers must also help LGBT families to develop and succeed. Furthermore, they must be willing to assist LGBT families in times of stress or difficulty, such as incidences of domestic violence or the termination of relationships.

8. Church leaders must affirm and support LGBT individuals and couples who parent children, as well as the children of these families. The number of families with children headed by LGBT people is considerable and growing. The formation of these families, which include both biological and adopted children, is motivated by the fundamental human desire to love and nurture the young. Church leaders should provide equal and free access to all relevant sacraments, work to ensure equal legal protections for all families, and lead efforts to end verbal and physical violence experienced by members of these families.

9. The church must work to ensure that all youth, including those who are “coming out” or questioning their gender identity or sexual orientation, are safe from verbal or physical harassment and violence at school and in other social settings. The opportunity to mature with a positive sense of identity is vital for all young people. They need a variety of positive role models, strong boundaries and encouragement to act in ways that demonstrate respect for themselves and others, even as they take risks that help them understand their capabilities and limitations.

10. LGBT Catholics, like all others, should be challenged to live out the Gospel values of service, compassion and community. LGBT Catholics must be involved in serving people living in poverty, suffering illness or living at the margins of society. We must be part of the faith-sharing that builds spiritual community. We must be reminded that loving neighbor as self is part of the Great Commandment. We must extend to all others the respect and dignity we have worked so hard to gain for ourselves.

*DignityUSA is the nation's foremost organization of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Catholics, their families, friends and supporters. Founded in 1969, it is an independent nonprofit organization with members and chapters across the country. DignityUSA works for the full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in the life of the Church and society.*  
[www.dignityusa.org](http://www.dignityusa.org)

## New Guidelines Issued for Ministering to GLBT Catholics — Calls for equal participation in church life including sacrament of marriage

By Chuck Colbert, with permission

*This article first appeared in In Newsweekly on July 19, 2007.*

DignityUSA, the nation's largest and oldest faith community for GLBT Catholics, while meeting in convention July 5 - 8 [2007] in Austin, Texas, issued new guidelines for pastoral care of people. The guidelines, said Jeff Stone, a spokesperson, of the New York chapter of Dignity, were in response to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Nov. 2006 guide, "Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care."

Last year, in their pastoral care document, the bishops wrote, "By its very nature, human sexuality finds its proper fulfillment in the marital bond. Any sexual act that takes place outside the indissoluble and lifelong bond of marriage does not fulfill the proper ends of human sexuality. It is not directed toward the expression of marital love with openness to new life. It is disordered in that it is not in accord with this twofold end and is thus morally wrong."

Ministry to gays and lesbians, the document says, requires mandatory life-celibacy. The bishops discuss gayness, with language describing homosexuality, gay life and love as "same-sex attraction," a "disorder" or "inclination." Accordingly, the bishops oppose any form of civil recognition for gay couples' commitment, everything from domestic partnership to civil unions to civil marriage — anything remotely approximating marital relationships. The bishops also oppose gay adoption because, they say, "homosexual unions are contrary to the divine plan."

Nonetheless, a growing consensus has emerged among Dignity's leaders and membership for a "proactive" rather than "reactive," response, Stone said, adding, "We want to develop the [Catholic] faith tradition that feels right and authentic" without "letting the bishops control us."

By comparison, Dignity's pastoral care guidelines affirm the "inherent dignity" of GLBT persons in their "diversity" as "members of Christ's mystical body." The guidelines call for "equal participation" in Church life, including the sacraments of marriage and ordination, specifically calling for "the opportunity to formalize our commitments, sacramentally" as well as through civil marriage. The guidelines also offer support and encouragement for GLBT youth, their parents and friends, and for the children of same-sex couples.

Ultimately, the document challenges all Catholics to "live out the Gospel values of service, compassion, and community," reminding ministers and worshipping communities that "love of neighbor" lies at the heart of the "great commandment."

A former DignityUSA national president and executive director, Marianne Duddy-Burke, who played a key role crafting the pastoral guidelines, said, "Over time we will see more and more Catholic groups, large and small, articulating their own vision of community, pastoral practice, and ethics." Duddy-Burke, of Boston, said the local Dignity chapter was active in the process, establishing a study group and holding a "listening night" where individuals could offer their perspectives.

True enough, what irked many GLBT Catholics, DignityUSA president Sam Sinnett said was the bishops' "not bothering to consult with openly LGBT people, or even with their own diocesan ministries that work directly with LGBT people."

"Our guidelines were developed through a process of broad consultation throughout our organization and beyond over the past six months," said Sinnett.

"Clearly, given the Catholic community's realization that the bishops no longer provide trustworthy moral leadership," Duddy-Burke said, more "authentic voices" are now filling that "void" created by the hierarchy's loss of credibility. "We've certainly seen bolder statements from theologians and commentators in recent years," she explained.

Since they were issued last week, Stone said the reaction to the guidelines has been so far uniformly positive.

"Dignity's pastoral care guidelines are based on solid theological and psychological foundations about the lived experience of LGBT people," said Frank DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry, a gay affirming, national Catholic education and research center.

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*New Guidelines Issued for Ministering to GLBT Catholics —  
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“These guidelines are a helpful alternative to the U.S. bishops’ 2006 guidelines, which were a radical departure from U.S. Catholic thought and practice about gay ministry. The Dignity guidelines actually represent more clearly the pastoral practice that is happening in the best gay ministry programs in dozens of Catholic parishes and dioceses around the U.S.. Mid-level Catholic leaders in Church institutions have not found the bishops 2006 guidelines realistic or helpful,” he added.

Casey Lopata, of Fortunate Families, a Rochester, NY– based gay positive ministry, primarily with Catholic parents of GLBT persons, said his group also “welcomes” Dignity’s pastoral guidelines. “They clearly reflect the kind of pastoral care hoped and prayed for by the vast majority of more than 275 Catholic parents of LGBT daughters and sons who responded to [a] Fortunate Families survey during the past year,” he said.

Lopata also voiced hope that “bishops, pastors, and all pastoral ministers will open their hearts and minds and listen to our LGBT daughters and sons,” he said. “They deserve the same pastoral care, if not more, given the hurt caused by the lack of such care. We fervently hope the institutional Church will seriously listen to and learn from our daughters and sons, and ultimately offer them the compassionate pastoral care exhibited by Jesus in the Gospels.”