

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.

Marriage Equality

Since Massachusetts legalized Marriage Equality in May 2004, there has been a four year drought in other states following suit. That changed May 15, 2008, with the California Supreme Court's historic decision invalidating the state's same-sex marriage ban. Despite this momentous victory recognizing equal treatment before the law, there are proposed constitutional amendments in Arizona, California and Florida to ban same-sex marriage on the November 2008 ballots. Marriage Equality has suddenly been catapulted as a major "wedge" issue in the upcoming national elections.



In light of these developments, we devote this issue of *QV* to the theme of Marriage Equality. Included are actions taken by DignityUSA and local chapters, stories by some Dignity couples relating to the sanctity and wholesomeness of same-sex marriage, and suggestions for use in discussions.

OUR Catholic experience on marriage equality will add a much-needed voice to the religious and political dialogue. ▼

DignityUSA's Resolution on Same-Sex Marriage

The following resolution was passed unanimously by the Board of Directors, DignityUSA during their meeting in Las Vegas, Aug 5-6, 2003.

Whereas DignityUSA believes that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people have the right to full expression of their sexuality in ways that are consistent with Catholic/Christian values, including the right to enter into committed relationships; AND

Whereas DignityUSA is the only national Catholic organization that sustains a multi-faceted program of support for same-sex couples, including the blessing of their commitments; AND

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Whereas the legal and spiritual recognition of same-sex couples is being debated by many legislative bodies and churches; AND

Whereas we know that civil marriage bestows important rights, protections and duties to the partners and their families and that religious affirmation of a couple's commitment honors the sacredness of their covenant;

Therefore be it resolved that DignityUSA declares the following position on same-sex marriage:

As Americans, we remind our fellow citizens of a foundational principle of our form of government: all are created equal. Consistent with the pursuit of liberty and justice for all, same-sex couples should have full and equal access to the rights and responsibilities bestowed by civil marriage.

As Catholics, we remind our Church of a foundational conviction of our faith: God is love and all that abide in love abide in God and God in them. The love that brings and binds two people of the same, or opposite sex, together has a divine source. It is therefore sacramental in nature and should be celebrated as such by our Church.

The resolution was ratified by vote of those at the membership meeting during the 2003 Biennial Convention in Las Vegas. ▼

DignityUSA's Couples Ministry

By Deb Myers and Nickie Valdez, Co-Chairs, Couples Ministry Committee

Marriage, same-sex unions, domestic partnerships, civil unions have all been part of the national and local political landscape for at least the last decade in this country. In reality, gay men and lesbians have been creating loving, physically and spiritually committed relationships as long as our heterosexual bothers and sisters. Maybe gay men and lesbians have had to do so with less fanfare and less legal stability, but they are nonetheless valid in our hearts and minds.

DignityUSA holds as one of its core values — expressed in our Statement of Position and Purpose — that not only can we act on our sexuality in an ethically responsible way, but that our relationships are loving, life-giving, and life-affirming. Therefore, DignityUSA has had “marriage” on its “agenda” for quite some time!

In 1995, in an effort to address the needs of its members and chapters, DignityUSA's National House of Delegates formally established a Couples Ministry Task Force. From that group's research, it became evident that there was a need for resources to assist individuals and chapters in the area of couples ministry. As a result, the DignityUSA's Board of Directors affirmed the recommendations of the Task Force to create resources for ongoing support for same-sex couples, a set of guidelines for Holy Unions within the context of Dignity chapter's ministry, and a national registry of couples whose relationships have been blessed by Dignity. Our Couples Ministry Resource Guide contains: guidelines for Holy Unions, samples of Holy Union Services, couples support programs and events by chapters, a bibliography, a Holy Union Certificate and the Holy Union Registry form. All of these materials may be found on our DignityUSA website at <http://www.dignityusa.org/couples/index.html>.

As we move toward “Marriage Equality,” DignityUSA's Couples Ministry Resource Guide and the Couples Registry, as well as the latest resource on our website “*Talking with your Legislator about Same-Gender Marriage: Catholics for Marriage Equality*,” (See page 11 in this issue.) and our lived experiences shared in this issue of *QV: Quarterly Voice of DignityUSA*, validate DignityUSA's commitment to its members and to its visions when “all GLBT Catholics are affirmed and experience dignity through the integration of their spirituality with their sexuality and as beloved persons of God participate fully in all aspects of life within the church and society.”

- **Have you had a union that satisfies DignityUSA Guidelines?** Find out at <http://www.dignityusa.org/couples/index.html>
- **Would you like to register your union with DignityUSA?** Download the form from our website <http://www.dignityusa.org/couples/registration.html>, contact us at info@dignityusa.org, or phone 1-800-877-8797.

The *QV: Quarterly Voice* is a publication of DignityUSA. It supplements DignityUSA's *DATELINE*, a monthly newsletter. *QV* is distributed in hardcopy, as well as 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>. You may also contact a local chapter to see if it will provide monthly hardcopies.

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 religious corporation organized under U.S. Internal Revenue Service Code 501(c)(3). Our national office is located in the Greater Boston area, with chapters located throughout the United States.

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

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

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

Bill Welch, Editor
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- **Are you already registered with DignityUSA?** We hope you are receiving an Anniversary Card. If not, contact us at info@dignityusa.org, or phone 1-800-877-8797
- **Would you like for DignityUSA to recognize your Union/Marriage of Anniversary (1, 5, 10, 15 ...)?** Please send in the information with chapter affiliation or place of residence (City and State) to Peggy Burns, our Operations Manager, by email to info@dignityusa.org or by phone 1-800-877-8797 to appear in the Transitions Section of our monthly publication *Dateline*. ▼

MEMBER PHOTOS & STORIES



L to R: Leah Vader, Doreen Peever, Lynne Huskinson

Vader – Huskinson Marriage

DignityUSA Members – Gillette, Wyoming

Leah Vader and Lynne Huskinson of Gillette, Wyoming, were married August 12, 2006, in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada by Doreen Peever, a Unitarian minister authorized by the Province of Ontario to perform marriage ceremonies within the Niagara Region.

The ceremony was performed on the small, but flower-rich Peever’s front porch.

Editor’s Note: Leah and Lynne had been banned from receiving the Eucharist due to their marriage and advocacy of same-sex marriage. The ban was lifted by the same bishop who had imposed it. See 1st Qtr 2008 QV: Quarterly Voice, page 6 at http://www.dignityusa.org/pdf/qv/2008/QV_DUSA_1stQtr2008.pdf, and “Sequels, Updates and Feedback” in 2nd Qtr 2008 QV on page 9 at http://www.dignityusa.org/pdf/qv/2008/QV_DUSA_2ndQtr2008.pdf ▼



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L to R: Thomas and Robert Van Etten

For the guys from Big Blue, the big day comes at last

By Anne Stockwell, Editor, *The Advocate*

<http://vowser.advocate.com/2008/06/for-the-guys-fr.html>

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As the day progressed in Indio, California, the bustle in the lobby took on a happy, tidal rhythm: As each fresh wave of applicants would flow in, nervous and excited, the bridal party of a newly married couple would re-enter from one of the improvised onsite chapels, suffused with emotion. Part of the fun was the clothes, of course. Women came in polo shirts and flowing dresses, with lipstick and without. Men wore ties and hearing aids – or wore their emotions on their T-shirts.

I was drawn to one elderly couple whose matching T's proclaimed: "Our Love waited 40+ years for this day! 4/13/1968 – 6/17/2008." Who were they? The Van Ettens, thank you very much. Thomas told me, "I changed my last name to Robert's in 1975 to make a statement about same-sex marriage. So we've been fighting this fight for years."

On cue, Robert picked up the story. "We went to an attorney and said, Is there anyplace in the world where we can get married? He said, You pay me and I'll check it out. He checked all the countries he could find and came back and said basically no. He said, Why don't one of you adopt the other? I said no, I won't accept that because that's hierarchical and our relationship is equal." They figured the name change would be "a good start."

Not only did they push for equality, they did it in the belly of Big Blue. "We worked for IBM for 30 years," Thomas said. "We were very open about our sexuality, because we knew that if we were closeted, it would destroy us either physically or mentally.

"In 1975, we went all the way to the corporate office of IBM about discrimination in the workplace for gays and lesbians. We were in Milwaukee, a very conservative city. But as a result of that, the next year we were transferred, after both being promoted, to headquarters located in Atlanta as a gay couple. It was the first transfer in the history of the corporation treated the same as [that of] a married couple."

Robert: "Then two years later we were transferred again as a gay couple to San Francisco. We kept working on this all our careers, and finally, in the late '90s, IBM announced that they would do domestic partner equal benefits. So it was a long haul, and it cost us professionally, but it was well worth it. We're very proud of the accomplishments that ended up by our work."

Thomas, who worked in human resources, helped to keep the couple from foundering on hidden homophobia. "We knew that we had to be the best employees that we could be, because otherwise they could've terminated us for non-performance," he said.

Robert rephrased more bluntly. "I think we pissed off a lot of people at IBM, but we were exceptional employees. For example, at one time during my career, I think IBM had a total worldwide employee count of 300,000, and at that time I was one of the top seven systems engineers in the United States. They couldn't get rid of us. So that gave us the opportunity to fight for equal rights."

Today, almost a decade after they helped to turn IBM into an LGBT friendly environment, the Van Ettens' other impossible dream was coming true.

They showed me their rings, engraved with their names and the date when they met. And when their witnesses arrived, they invited me to the wedding. In truth, they were thrilled that *The Advocate* was also here to witness.

The ceremony was brief. Thomas teared up right away; even Robert, the blunt engineer, quavered a bit as he promised to love "as long we both shall live."

With their rings exchanged, their marriage sealed with a kiss and a crushing hug, Thomas turned to face us first. Wiping his eyes, he cried, "I'm a mess!"

Editor's Note: Thomas and Robert Van Etten, Dignity/Palm Springs (CA) joined DignityUSA in 1999. ▼

Member Photos and Stories continued on page 5



L to R: Kathy Ann Gianino & Alice Knowles

Civil marriages were abounding: by the end of the summer of 2004, eight other couples from Dignity/Boston were married. The freedom of the civil marriage is its fortitude —freedom to be ourselves; freedom to converse with others on a plane of commonality; freedom to express our love; and freedom to have our love witnessed and acknowledged.

As part of the civil marriage service — prior to stating that the marriage is legal — these words are spoken “By the power vested in me by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts...” Those words alone echo in our hearts remembering the thunderous applause which sends shivers up your spine. We had not dared to hope for this level of acceptance.

Our four-year marriage continues to grow. We are most grateful to Margaret Marshall, the Supreme Court Justice who authored the decision to allow same-sex marriage; the legislators who courageously stood against the conservative elements and the Catholic Church; and those who advocated for this change. We are fortunate that our spiritual home is Dignity. ▼

Our Wedding

By Alice Knowles and Kathy Ann Gianino, Dignity/Boston

On June 27, 2004, Kathy Ann and I, Alice, had a blessing of our commitment and a civil marriage. As I was anxiously awaiting at the entrance of The Church of St. John the Evangelist in Boston for the beginning of Dignity/Boston’s Liturgy that evening, the coordinator of our service remarked that this was the first time anyone had been “married” at a Dignity service. With that in mind, the nervousness lifted. Our love and community were gifts. We were getting our chance to honor the Dignity pilgrims!

Dignity is essential to our relationship. Five years earlier, we met through the good graces of a brave Dignitite who took a risk in introducing us. Our relationship flourished and was nurtured by the Dignity/Boston community.

We had planned to have a blessing of our commitment after Kathy Ann retired. She was a closeted school teacher. But the law in Massachusetts changed in May 2004 and so did our lives. We were determined to be married. We looked for a Justice of Peace to marry us in a quiet ceremony in our backyard. Then, Kathy Ann asked if I was interested in a simple blessing at the Dignity/Boston Sunday Liturgy...and why not marriage! The simple blessing became a little more grand and it was made possible by the efforts and loving support of our chosen family.

The day was glorious. The church was full. Our families, friends, and coworkers — including 33 people from Kathy Ann’s school — joined the Dignity/Boston community in this blessing. A rabbi performed the civil marriage.

Over the years we had witnessed many blessings of unions at liturgies. They have always been beautiful and joyful — ours was no exception.



L to R: David Brian Houle & Michael Luke Sullivan

Our Evolving Relationship

By David Brian Houle and Michael Luke Sullivan, Dignity/Boston

Michael and I met on Saturday, May 29, 1993. I was visiting Port Clyde and Monhegan Island in Maine through my GLBT outdoor organization, Chiltern Mountain Club. A group of us had spent the previous evening on the mainland in Port Clyde and were now ready to head down to the boat for our trip to Monhegan. As my friend Paul Bachand and I were waiting on

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Our Evolving Relationship
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the dock for the boat to sail, we met all of the people gathering for the trip. One person, in particular, a very slim, cute redhead caught my attention. We talked for a bit on shore and then separated while on the boat. I found out later that this redhead was watching me pat a golden retriever on the boat the entire time that we were sailing. When we disembarked onto Monhegan Island, we chatted again. During every hike on the island, we chatted more. During every meal, we sat together. We expressed our feelings for one another over a nice cup of hot chocolate in the evening. By the time we left the island, we knew that somehow, some way, we needed to make this work. I was living in Somerville, Massachusetts and Michael in Hartford, Connecticut, so we had some challenges to deal with.

During the next two years, we commuted. I learned everything about Hartford and Michael reacquainted himself with Boston, where he had studied for his undergraduate degree. He learned of my love for restaurants and of my quite bizarre sense of humor. I learned of his love of chocolate and his high degree of empathy for those in need. After awhile, the commute took its toll on us and in November 1994, Michael moved to the Boston area.

1994, in some ways, was a stressful time. I was in love with this wonderful man but also loved my wonderful parents, who didn't know that I was a gay man. By August 1994, I decided to let my parents know. After worrying about their reaction since 1978, I decided to tell them who I was—a gay man and a loving partner. They quickly came to love not only Michael, but Michael's family as well. Our worlds were coming together.

Perhaps surprising to some, Michael and I didn't move in together. It was important for Mike to get settled into the Boston area and make it his own. He lived in apartments in the suburbs until 1996. By September 1996, we took the next big step. We moved in together. By June 1998, we were buying a house in Arlington, Massachusetts. Two years later we bought a puppy! "Popeye" — direct from the streets of Puerto Rico — became another loving presence in our home.

Living together made life so much better and so much easier. Together, we shared meals every night; celebrated good times with our families, and worshipped with Dignity/Boston — our spiritual community and home. It is this integration of our spirituality and sexuality that has given so much life to our relationship.

In 2002 we decided to get married. On May 17, 2003, at the Wellesley College Houghton Chapel — with 130 people as witnesses and support, including members of Dignity/Boston — we exchanged rings, offered vows to one another, and celebrated a Holy Union. Exactly one year later, May 17, 2004, same-gender marriage became legal in Massachusetts. On May 29, 2004, the anniversary of the first day we met, we had a simple ceremony in our backyard and received our marriage certificate.

Michael and I, along with our faithful dog "Popeye," continue to live in our Arlington, MA home, feeling blessed by our family, our friends, and our Dignity community. ▼



L to R: Jane Powers, Jon Schum, Peggy Hayes

Made in Massachusetts

By Peggy Hayes and Jane Powers, Dignity/Boston

Jane and I became domestic partners in the City of Cambridge, MA on Valentine's Day, 1994. The registration had all the romance of getting a fishing license, but it was all the legal system could offer us at the time, and we celebrated with pictures, flowers and a special dinner.

In the context of our faith, we celebrated our covenant ceremony at Dignity/Boston's regular Sunday 5:30 p.m. liturgy on October 10, 1999, surrounded by family, friends and Dignity family. We felt we were as "married" as we could be.

Celebrating the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court victory, we legally married in our backyard in July, 2004, copresided by a Justice of the Peace and Jon Schum, the Dignity/Boston presider who had presided over our covenant ceremony. We were in the first 1,000 same-sex couples married in Massachusetts and we're profoundly grateful we were able to take this legal, public step.

We are most thankful for the advocacy of DignityUSA and countless others who fought for this in Massachusetts, and who will eventually help us win this right for all same-sex couples in every state.

In a happy footnote, the Governor of Massachusetts, Deval Patrick, signed two major pieces of LGBT-rights legislation on

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Made in Massachusetts
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July 31, 2008. One — the repeal of a 1913 law that prevented couples marrying in Massachusetts if their marriage would not be recognized in their home state; second — the MassHealth Equality bill.

The original intent of the 1913 law was racist, to prevent bi-racial couples visiting Massachusetts to marry, but it effectively kept out many same-sex couples. The MassHealth Equality bill requires the state to provide the same benefits to married same-sex and heterosexual couples through MassHealth, the state’s Medicaid program.

Goodbye to another bad law; hello to another step on the path to equality. ▼



L to R: Ron Lacro, Jon Schum

I Now Pronounce You Married

By Ron Lacro and Jon Schum, Dignity/Boston

On November 17, 2003, the Supreme Judicial Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts ruled that civil marriage was a fundamental right belonging to all citizens, including couples of the same gender. The court mandated that the state begin issuing marriage licenses six months from the date of the decision. History was being written and it was a thrilling prospect.

In Massachusetts, a couple must first file an intent to marry before the marriage license is issued. The City of Cambridge opened the doors of City Hall on the evening of May 16, 2004, so couples could begin the legal process at midnight. We completed our paperwork sometime around 4:00 a.m. and were

among the first couple hundred of same-gender couples in the state and nation to apply for civil marriage.

The atmosphere outside City Hall that night was electrifying. Five thousand supporters of marriage equality — most from the LGBT community — were there to cheer each couple emerging from the city hall offices with the legal paper in hand. Shortly after midnight and into the early dawn hours, one couple after another walked jubilantly down the steps and into the night. Our hearts jumped as a handful of supporters applauded and cheered us as we left City Hall. Inside, city officials — some in tuxedos — welcomed couples and gave directions. The mayor hosted a party in the city council chamber complete with wedding cake and a serenading chorus. A crew from local cable access television was there to capture the moment in history.

Four days later, we returned for the issuing of our license.

Had this long-awaited moment really arrived? During the 6-month waiting period, it had been a roller coaster of a ride as we waited to see if our opponents would prevail in seeking a stay of the court’s decision. We anguished that the legislature’s proposal of civil unions would satisfy the court. However, the justices swiftly rejected the proposal by clearly stating that it was marriage itself and nothing less that was mandated.

On June 19, 2004, encircled by a small group of family and friends in our home, we were joined in marriage. The minister proclaimed, “By the authority invested in me by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I now pronounce you married.” The words left us breathless. One year later, in the presence of a much larger gathering, we spoke our own vows and exchanged rings as we celebrated our marriage sacramentally, surrounded by the Dignity/Boston community. ▼



3rd & 4th from L: Brendan Fay & Dr. Thomas Moulton

With Grateful Hearts We Say Thanks

By Brendan Fay & Dr. Thomas Moulton, Dignity/New York

Brendan Fay and Tom Moulton were legally wed Sunday July 27, 2003, at St. James Park, beside St. Lawrence Hall, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, by Judge Harvey Brownstone of Toronto's family court. Witnesses were Edward DeBonis and Vincent Maniscalco, friends from Dignity/New York, where Fay and Moulton met in 1996.

Judge Brownstone reminded the couple of the international treaties honoring Canadian marriages. He also noted that every day in family court he presides over cases involving family breakdown, abuse and separations. Legally recognizing the love and intimacy of Fay and Moulton was as much a joy for him as for the couple.

Later that Sunday, at the evening Mass of Dignity/New York, prayers of thanks were offered with a reception for the pioneering newlyweds.

“With grateful hearts we say thanks for you who have been with us on our adventure in marriage, our dance of life and feast of love these past five years!

“Five years ago we celebrated the path of shared love and life together. For all the days, months and years we have had together, there was something special about the marriage rite and wedding hooley — being surrounded by friends and family; choosing each other; exchanging rings, promises and hearts; letting go to God, and letting the world know. When Raymond invited you all up to pray with us, we still feel the warm support of your affection and cheers. In good days and not so good days, you help us enkindle the flame and sparkle of committed love and friendship.

“For your advice, cheers, friendship, prayers, and encouragement — thanks a million — *nie buiochas!!* So many warm memories this beautiful day....”

Polish after-effects

In March, 2008, Poland's conservative, anti-gay President Lech Kaczynski, of the Law and Order Party, used Brendan and Thomas' wedding photo to drum up Polish opposition to ratifying a European Union treaty that would legalize marriage equality among member states.

When Brendan found out about the unauthorized use of the photo, he lodged a complaint with the Polish Consulate in New York. In Poland, Prime Minister Donald Tusk, of the parliamentary majority Civic Platform Party, denounced President Kaczynski's use of the photo.

A private television station in Warsaw, TVN, invited Brendan and Thomas to Poland and paid for their trip. When they landed in Warsaw, print and broadcast journalists swarmed over the couple and followed them throughout their travels. Polish activists said that this was the biggest publicity for gay rights in Poland's history.

The couple met with Ryszard Kalisz, the head of the parliamentary committee on human rights in Poland and a leading member of the left-of-center coalition. At a news conference, Thomas stated, “I want to reiterate that we feel comforted by the Polish people who feel badly about how our images have been used. We come here in the hope of opening a dialogue with a community that may have not had much voice — and that will make Poland a better place. The issue here is about equality.”

On April 1, 2008, the couple returned to New York. The following day, President Kaczynski gave into pressure and the Polish Parliament ratified the Lisbon Treaty affirming marriage equality for GLBT people! ▼

Dignity/San Diego Initiates Getting Married with Dignity™

By Pat McArron, Dignity/San Diego and Bill Welch, DignityUSA Editor

California's Supreme Court rendered a decision on May 15, 2008, declaring the ban of same-sex marriage to be unconstitutional. Chief Justice Ronald George, who wrote the majority opinion, said the Constitution “properly must be interpreted to guarantee this basic civil right [to marriage] to all Californians, whether gay or heterosexual, and to same-sex couples as well as opposite sex couples.” The change in California law and the Family Code took effect on Saturday, June 14, 2008.

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Dignity/San Diego Initiates Getting Married with Dignity™
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Shortly after the May 15, 2008 decision, Dignity/San Diego developed Getting Married with Dignity™ welcoming couples who wish to marry in accordance with California State Law. All couples will be expected to follow certain procedures in preparation for marriage in accordance with Dignity/San Diego's Marriage Policy found at <http://www.dignitysd.org/marriagewithdignity/policy.htm>.

Included in the policy is a provision that at least one individual of the couple seeking marriage shall be a Baptized Catholic. The marriage ceremony is available to members of Dignity/San Diego, as well as non-members.

It is the responsibility of the couple to obtain a Marriage License and have it available at the time of the ceremony. Two witnesses, in addition to the officiant, will be required to sign the license. A Marriage Certificate will be issued to the couple after the ceremony. Dignity members will have their wedding registered with the DignityUSA National Couples Registry. A couple has 90 days from the obtaining of a Marriage License to celebrate their wedding and return the license to the county clerk for recording.



Included in the list of persons authorized to solemnize marriage ceremonies in California are a priest, minister or rabbi of any religious denomination. Therefore, Chaplains of Dignity/San Diego are authorized to act as Marriage Officiant to perform the marriage ceremony. The ceremony is an integral part of the California civil marriage process.

Further details are available at <http://www.dignitysd.org/marriagewithdignity/index.htm>.

The chapter has disseminated the information about Marriage with Dignity™ on the chapter's webpage shown above, in their weekly Sunday Bulletins, and at the San Diego Pride Celebration held Saturday and Sunday, July 19 & 20, 2008.

First Ceremony

The first ceremony of Getting Married with Dignity™ was a double-wedding of two lesbian couples on July 13, 2008, following the chapter's regularly scheduled Sunday Mass.

Bridget Wilson, Dignity/San Diego Vice President, and her partner Kim McAlister have been together for 27 years. Bridget's sister Donna Wilson and her partner Denise Campbell have been together for 22 years and live in Nebraska. Kay Wilson — proud mother of Bridget and Donna and member of DignityUSA — was present to witness the marriage.

Father John, a chapter chaplain, was presider for the chapter Mass and also served as officiant and presider at the marriage ceremonies.

These marriages were the first to be recorded with DignityUSA and Dignity/San Diego since the California Supreme Court decision on May 15, 2008. July 13, 2008, the day of the double-wedding, was a most historic day for the national organization and the chapter.

McArron and partner get marriage license

Pat McArron, Past President of DignityUSA, and his partner Glenn Stokes — both residents of San Diego and members of Dignity/San Diego — picked up their California Marriage License on 8/8/08 at the historic San Diego County Administration Center. Their planned Marriage with Dignity™ is scheduled for November 2, 2008, in conjunction with the chapter's Mass. It will also be the day they celebrate their 35th Anniversary as partners. ▼

Commentary

By Bill Welch, Editor

In the July 2008 Dateline — DignityUSA's monthly newsletter — "Marriage Equality" was announced as the theme for this edition of *QV: Quarterly Voice of DignityUSA*. Submissions of related stories and photos were solicited. No specific guidelines were given as to content, nor were the submissions edited to reflect issues, agenda or common thread.

While in the review and production mode, I found certain common or outstanding threads in the stories:

- The important role of spiritual support, acceptance and friendship accorded the couples by members and friends of local Dignity chapters — their faith community, as well as the appreciation expressed by the couples.
- The important role of official recognition of the foundation, love and mutual respect and support in their partnered relationship.
- The melding of the couple's and individual's spirituality and sexuality.

Many thanks to the contributors of the stories and photos. Special thanks to Marianne Duddy-Burke, Executive Director; Jeff Stone, Director of Media Relations, and members of his committee, for significant behind-the-scenes work associated with marriage equality.

The story and announcement of Dignity/San Diego's Getting Married with Dignity™ on page 8 is wonderful news and an excellent example of "pro-activity" and support by a local chapter.

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I am of the opinion that when we speak on Marriage Equality we need to stress we are talking about the recognition of love, equal rights and obligations — NOT special rights. We do not endorse two-tier marriage or equivalent life partnerships. No opposite-sex or same-sex marriages; just one — marriage for all with same rights and obligations.

Proponents and supporters — including state and national conferences of Catholic bishops — of state constitution amendment referendums designed to limit marriage to one man and one woman, employ fear tactics stating that the authorization or inclusion of marriage of same-sex couples devalues or destabilizes heterosexual marriage and family. Yet, in “Always Our Children” and other documents, they espouse that all humanity is created in the image and likeness of God, and that homosexual persons should not suffer injustice or unjust discrimination.

Conferences of bishops and other members of the Catholic Church hierarchy employ circularity in defense or definitions of positions and teachings. For example, “sacrament” is defined as an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace. Matrimony, or holy marriage, is described as being instituted by Christ, or raised to the dignity of a sacrament by Christ. I have yet to find out how, when and where either in research or questions posed to Catholic theologians or biblical history scholars. An answer of the Marriage Feast at Cana doesn’t work for me. Christ and his mother were there as guests. He wasn’t the presider, officiant or official witness. ▼

Talking with Friends, Families, and Colleagues about Marriage for Gay and Lesbian Couples

Developed by DignityUSA with the assistance of Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD).

There is no question that marriage and other forms of recognition for gay and lesbian couples are tough issues for many Catholics. Happily, most Catholics want to do the right thing, both from a faith perspective and in recognition of the gay people in their lives whom they love and respect. They’re just not sure what the right thing is. By resolving the conflict they feel, we can help move them from being undecided on an “issue” to being supportive of loving, committed couples.

In conversations about marriage, we need to do three things. First, we must acknowledge that gay and lesbian couples want to marry for the same reason as straight couples—to make a lifelong promise to love and care for each other. Second, we must show our fellow Catholics how shutting committed couples out of marriage causes them real harm by making it hard

for them to take care of each other. Third, we must remind Catholics that our faith calls us to care about each other, and opposes making life harder for some people than for others.

Catholics have an important role in the public discussion of marriage. As the largest denomination in the U.S., Catholics represent about a quarter of all voters. Our Church’s leadership has often been in the forefront of efforts to maintain laws that cause real harm to real people, and their positions are often, mistakenly, assumed to represent the views of all Catholics.

So, how do you begin?

1. Marriage is about love and commitment. Lesbian and gay couples want the same thing as straight couples—to build a life with someone. Both straight and gay couples want to take care of and be responsible for each other. Both need the security and legal protections of marriage that help make this possible. Catholics understand that this kind of lifelong commitment deserves support.

2. Denying committed couples the security and legal protections of marriage hurts them; it’s wrong to make it harder for committed couples to take care of and be responsible for each other. Catholics believe in fairness, and know it is wrong to deny gay couples the security and legal protections they need in order to be able to care for each other in sickness and health, and even in death. Catholics who are actively or passively against marriage for lesbian and gay couples are not just maintaining the status quo—they are taking an active role in hurting gay couples and families.

Focus on stories that help Catholics feel connected to gay couples. A partner’s illness, the ability to make medical decisions, anxiety over how to take care of children in emergency situations, being able to take a leave from work to care for a sick partner help people understand the importance of marriage for committed couples.

3. Talk about why this issue is important to you. Be honest and specific about your relationship to marriage equality. Are you a partner in a committed couple seeking equal civil protections for your relationship or your family? Perhaps you are the parent of a partnered lesbian or gay child, who wants the same legal protections for this child as for your other children’s relationships. You may have a gay or lesbian sibling, and want to support his or her lifelong commitment to a partner. Telling your story, and why the protections offered by civil marriage are important to you or someone you love, is the most powerful witness you can give.

4. Discuss the values from Catholic tradition that support your belief in ensuring gay couples have the support they need to care for their partners.

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Talking with Friends, Families, and Colleagues about Marriage for Gay and Lesbian Couples
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Is the equality of all of the people created and loved by God the main issue for you? Does the Church's tradition as a leader in social justice guide you? Did you come to your position based on a decision from an informed conscience?

5. Be sure those you are speaking with are aware that civil marriage and religious marriage are different, although often conflated in our society. Nothing that would allow the equal protections of civil marriage would force any religious representative or institution to perform weddings they choose not to. All religions would maintain their ability to choose which marriages to sanction.

6. If your local bishops are organizing a campaign against marriage equality, express your views about what they are doing. Say why you feel it is important to represent another Catholic perspective on this issue. Many people assume that the bishops are speaking for all Catholics, and are unaware of the diversity of opinions within the Church on this civil matter.

How the Church handles sacramental marriage is within the legitimate purview of the bishops; however, as a citizen and a voter, your goal is to do away with laws that make it harder for gay couples to take care of each other.

7. If your priest reads a statement opposing marriage equality from the altar, or directs parishioners to sign a statement, challenge him on this action.

There are sure to be many lesbian and gay people and parents of gays and lesbians in every congregation. Ask the priest to reflect on the pastoral implications of making statements that can cause great pain to these members of his flock. If you know of people who may have been hurt or angered, seek them out and let them know you disagree with this approach. Perhaps you can support each other in engaging other parishioners in conversation about this issue.

Please feel free to call DignityUSA at 1-800-877-8797 to tell us about your experiences, and get more ideas about your situation. DignityUSA's website, www.dignityusa.org, has a number of resources, including *A Call to Wed: Why Catholics Should Celebrate Same-Sex Marriage* by Patricia Beattie Jung, and *DignityUSA's 2003 resolution in support of same-sex marriage*.

Also, please visit GLAAD's "Talking About" series for information on addressing a range of topics of importance to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. The marriage pamphlet can be found at:
<http://www.glaad.org/talkingaboutseries/pdfs/Talking%20About%20Marriage.pdf> ▼

Talking with Legislators about Same-Gender Marriage: Catholics for Marriage Equality

1. It is very important to identify yourself as a Catholic who supports marriage equality.

Talk a little about the role faith plays in your life. If official Church teachings on homosexuality have influenced your beliefs at any time, be honest about that.

2. Talk about why this issue is important to you.

Be honest and specific about your relationship to marriage equality. Are you a partner in a same-sex couple seeking equal civil protections for your relationship or your family? Are you the parent of a partnered lesbian or gay child, who wants the same civil protections for this child as for your other child(ren)'s relationships? Do you have a gay or lesbian sibling, and believe his or her committed relationship deserves civil recognition?

3. Identify the values from Catholic tradition support your belief in civil marriage equality.

Did you come to your position based on a decision from an informed conscience? Does the Church's tradition as a leader in social justice guide you? Is the equality of all of the people created and loved by God the main issue for you?

4. Acknowledge your awareness that the bishops are organizing a campaign against marriage equality and why you feel it is important to represent another Catholic perspective on this issue.

Legislators often assume that the bishops are speaking for all Catholics, and are unaware of the diversity of opinions within the Church on this civil matter.

How the Church handles sacramental marriage is within the legitimate purview of the bishops; however, as a citizen and a voter, your goal is to end legalized discrimination against lesbian and gay couples and our families and to promote equal protections for all families in civil matters.

5. Thank the legislator (or staff person) for listening, and urge their support on matters of marriage equality. It is fine to ask how he/she (or the legislator) will vote on any pending legislation.

If the legislator is a supporter, thank her/him for being a leader on this issue, and acknowledge that you appreciate that others may challenge this position.

If the legislator expresses concerns, ask what they are, and try to address them. If the legislator raises issues you are not comfortable addressing, validate the concern, and let him or her know you will try to find someone who can address that issue. Get in touch with your state's Marriage Equality organization to let them know about your conversation and the legislator's question. Respond to the issue as soon as you are able, or let the legislator know who will be in touch.

6. If the legislator has any questions for you, answer them as honestly as you can. ▼