

From the Editor, Fr. Dick Young

"If we don't change, we don't grow. If we don't grow, we aren't really living." So says Gail Sheehy, the popular, best-selling author. Jesus, of course, REALLY wants us to live. "I have come," he taught us, "that [you] might have life, and have it to the full." (Jn. 10:10) Change is inevitable. The growing and living fully, which should result from it, unfortunately don't always follow. Our response to change is what makes us or breaks us.

The Board of Directors of DignityUSA is always changing. New members come and go as terms expire and new people are elected. If you look at the BOD list with this issue of QV, you will see that my name is no longer on it. There are other deletions and additions, effective October 1. It should not be difficult for the entire membership to have a very positive and enthusiastic response to these changes. Some outstanding growth and a more alive organization are sure to result from the leadership of these talented new directors. You were wise enough to nominate and elect them. Now you must support them in their work to Empower the Voice of DignityUSA.

This issue has a report on the Chicago chapter's participation in the recent Gay Games and a piece about the honoring of Dignity members by the LGBT community in San Diego. And, although the recent court decision regarding marriage equality in Washington State went against us, Dignity/Seattle was there to work hard on our behalf, as our press release, printed here, shows. Clearly, our organization has a positive impact in many parts of the country.

We change, and we grow so that DignityUSA can continue to be a source of life for others. That's a tradition that must NOT change.

If we do not speak, who will?

DignityUSA President, Sam Sinnett

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of God's power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."
(Ephesians 6: 10 ff)

I don't usually relate to these metaphors of power and war in the Scriptures and don't view the world in that way. I especially don't think of the work of DignityUSA in these terms. But your DignityUSA is hard pressed right now. In order to put on the metaphoric "armor of God" to "fight" those who speak and act against us in ways that are not of God, we need resources.

The Board of Directors you have chosen has been dealing with serious issues of declining assets, declining donations and budget cutting for some time now. In our first meeting of the new fiscal year in early October, we still face some daunting questions.

Our membership has grown dramatically in the past three years, effectively Amplifying the Voice for us GLBT Catholics, but the donor base and donations have continued a decline similar to the prior dues-based membership declines of the past twenty-plus years. We can speculate on causes, both internal and external -- both controllable and those that come from more "cosmic powers." We have acknowledged and put in place remedies for our own customer service gaps and have worked hard to remind members and donors of both our accomplishments and our need for financial support. We are also

working on issues of members' battle fatigue and what someone termed the "Benedict Effect."

The fact remains that we and our total membership have not sufficiently Empowered the Voice with the needed fundraising and donations despite the heroic efforts and sacrifices of many of you. We can never thank you enough if you have been responding to this extra challenge over the past year. The continued generosity of so many of you is astounding. Please keep up your support! Still we now face the immediate possibility of not being able to maintain our current Washington, DC office and the already-reduced staffing levels at which we are currently operating. Much of our work has always been done by volunteers and will continue to be, but paid staff is essential also.

Many of you have heard me say that the low level of our membership three years ago imperiled our ability to continue to be an effective national organization. How -- and now, if -- we continue in that role remains the foremost question you and your chosen leaders must grapple with.

We each get down to the most fundamental of questions:

- Why do you belong to DignityUSA?
- Do you feel passionate about the work and mission of DignityUSA today? If so, why? I'd like to hear the answer to that question of why we are a passionate people from any of you who wish to share that with all of us. One good way to respond to me is via e-mail at President@DignityUSA.org. I'll share some of those via our DignityNews list.
- What will be missed if we scale back the visibility of DignityUSA?
- Are you prepared today

...to Empower the Voice for GLBT Catholics to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves and to counterbalance the ever increasing virulence we all too often hear from the Vatican and other Catholic bishops?

...to Empower the Voice to be in coalition with our Catholic and Christian allies and with our LGBT allies?

...to Empower the Voice to have the telephones and other messages answered when sisters and brothers urgently reach out for a Voice to provide real Christian love and support?

The need is now. Your decision time is now.

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What can you do? Empower the Voice with your increased financial support now. Please go to www.dignityusa.org, and click on the "Donate" button, and make your contribution securely on-line. (Of course, you can always call the office about your donation or simply mail a check.) Just a reminder that our fiscal year ends on September 30. With your help, we can end the year with a balanced budget.

Our Voice must be heard! If we do not speak, who will?



Washington State Gay Catholics to continue working for Marriage Equality despite disappointing State Supreme Court ruling

"The following is an edited version of a press release from DignityUSA and Dignity/Seattle, dated July 28, 2006. It was issued in response to the Washington State Supreme Court ruling, upholding that state's so-called 'Defense of Marriage Act.'"

Washington State Gay Catholics to continue working for Marriage Equality despite disappointing State Supreme Court ruling

DignityUSA, the foremost organization for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) Catholics along with our families, friends, straight allies, and other supportive people of faith, and Dignity/Seattle, the local chapter, expressed profound disappointment over the Washington State Supreme Court decision on July 26, 2006, upholding the 1998 state "Defense of Marriage Act" (DOMA). The decision overruled previous rulings by King County and Thurston County Courts in 2004 that found DOMA unconstitutional.

"After this bitter disappointment, we have to channel our anger into constructive, forward-looking action," commented Leo Egashira, spokesperson for Dignity/Seattle. The close 5-4 decision and the extreme range of positions represented by the six written opinions strongly suggest that the matter will be open to judicial scrutiny again in the future. In the near term, however, marriage equality advocates will refocus the struggle from the judiciary to the legislative arena, which will require a much more concerted effort to line up supporters against considerable Republican opposition. State Representative Ed Murray (D-Seattle), who successfully shepherded the GLBT Civil Rights Bill in January 2006, promised to introduce a Marriage Equality Bill in January 2007. Governor Christine Gregoire (D) has indicated her openness to sign such a bill, were it to reach her desk after legislative approval.

Egashira said that, in this next legislative stage of the struggle, "Dignity/Seattle will work proactively with organizations such as the Religious Coalition for Equality, a network of over 200 Washington State religious leaders, to protect newly won GLBT civil rights and to advocate for marriage equality rights. As the only Catholic voice in the state with the conviction and courage to challenge the

church hierarchy publicly, Dignity/Seattle has an important role to play in the on-going effort to make marriage equality a reality in Washington."

Just one week prior to the court's decision, the Archbishop of Seattle filed an amicus (friend of the court) brief supporting DOMA. Countering some of the Archbishop's points, which will undoubtedly be raised again, Egashira asserted, "The best way for a progressive, caring society to avoid the 'inevitable collision with religion' is to separate the two completely:

Allow consenting adults to enter into civil marriage, while at the same time, continue to allow churches to sanction only those marriages which meet their particular religious criteria. How can such an arrangement be construed as an infringement of 'the free practice of religion in Washington State?'" Egashira asked.

Egashira continued, "The Archbishop's assertion that 'the state has the responsibility for the common good' is the perfect reason for legalizing marriage equality. Inviting and welcoming the increasing numbers of committed same-sex couples and families into the institution of marriage is the best exemplar of ensuring the common good. I'm mystified why the hierarchy fears that a more inclusive definition of marriage weakens the institution. Increasing the number of heretofore excluded couples, children, and families as stakeholders can only strengthen the role and importance of marriage in society."

Debbie Weill, Executive Director of the national organization, DignityUSA, also expressed disappointment in the ruling. She stated, "We have been working for many years in DignityUSA and our local Dignity chapters for the right to civil marriage. We believe that as Americans who fulfill our obligations in every way as citizens, we are entitled to the fundamental human right to marry a partner of our choosing. This mistaken court decision in Washington State will delay the cause of full equality for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people across the nation."

Weill continued, "As Catholics, we also believe that our love has a divine source, that it is sacramental in nature, and that it should be celebrated as such by our Church. Along with many others, we are working to spread the news that there are millions of GLBT people of faith who believe that their sexuality and their relationships are a gift from God. But we also believe in the separation of church and state, and that religious views must not be used to deny gay people their fundamental civil rights as American citizens."



Blessing of Participants and Volunteers for Gay Games VII

On Sunday, July 16, Dignity/Chicago invited Gay Games athletes to participate in a blessing at the Chapter's 5:00 mass. Twelve people came forward - several chapter members, members from other chapters, a Methodist woman from the Quad Cities and a young man from the Netherlands - to receive the blessing and good wishes from all for a successful event.

The following is the text of the blessing that was used for that occasion:

Blessing of Participants and Volunteers for Gay Games VII

The following replaces the final blessing and dismissal.

LMP We invite all who will participate in the Gay Games to come forward, that we may ask God's blessing upon them.

LMP Let us pray *pause*

LMP Blessed are you, Source of life, Creator of all things, for you rejoice in our rest and in our play, delighting always in the work of your hands: Blessed be God forever!

Assembly Blessed be God forever!

LMP Blessed are you, Holy Wisdom, Word-made-flesh, for you became one of us, sharing our joy and hope, our dreams and laughter: Blessed be God forever!

Assembly Blessed be God forever!

LMP Blessed are you, Breath of God, Spirit of power, for you enliven our bodies to praise God's name, filling us with energy and strength: Blessed be God forever!

Assembly Blessed be God forever!

LMP Let us extend our hands over our sisters and brothers as we pray for their success:

OMP Strong and faithful God, as we gather for these Gay Games, we ask you to bless these athletes, participants, and volunteers, and all who will lift them up with shouts of encouragement.

Keep them safe from injury and harm, instill in them respect and love for each other, and reward them for their perseverance.

May these Games lead us all to the fullness of peace and friendship promised in our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns forever and ever.

OMP God be with you. And also with you. May God bless you: Creator, Redeemer, and Holy Spirit.

LMP Go in peace to love and serve our God. Thanks be to God.

A Reflection on Participating in Gay Games VII

By Bob Dybas of Dignity/Chicago

First, signing up for the Games we did not really know what to expect.

We had seen a lot of advertising and people talking about it but never actually met anyone that participated in any of the previous games.

The publicity for the games focused on the athletics, and really downplayed the social aspect, which we were to find out was the true attraction. Our first experience was when we attended a fund raiser as a guest of one of the softball players (who was the treasurer for the games). At this fundraiser, held in April, 2006 and called "A Night of 100 Champions," we got our first taste of what it was all about. Esera Tualo and Greg Louganis were at the event along with numerous other gay personalities.

Opening ceremonies were quite exciting with the parade into the stadium with thousands of other participating athletes. Our four year old granddaughter was cheering us on saying "you can do it; you can do it!" as we ran into the stadium. The highlight was when the athletes who were on the Soldier Field surface shined colored



flashlights (on cue) which formed the rainbow flag. The speakers for the most part were noteworthy though for our taste some were a bit too serious and way too long-winded for what was supposed to be a joyous event. The mayor, however, gave one of the better, more impassioned speeches that he has ever delivered. However, all things considered, the camaraderie among the participants made it a great evening.

The cycling was very exciting. I had met some really interesting people from around the United States and Europe, which was great, but I was not quite prepared for the seriousness of some of the competitors. The times that some of the competitors had in the races were very impressive; my own, not so impressive. However, I learned a lot about competitive cycling so if I ever decide to pursue it as a hobby in the future, I will be somewhat more prepared.

The softball playing experience was equally as competitive. Our softball team played in five games and we were never really competitive. Even at a recreational level, our team was very much outmatched by the competition, some of which was "playing down" a division or more, as the higher divisions filled up quickly with teams. As a side note, after playing these higher skilled teams our team won its first game all season in the first game after playing the Gay Games teams. We were no longer intimidated by the teams in our own league. I am sure a psychological study could be done about that.

We also watched the swimming competition, which was held at the newly completed natatorium at the University of Chicago. Our friend, the treasurer for the games, was a swimmer, and we went to support him. The crowd for the swimming events was quite large. (Not that seeing five hundred nearly naked men would be a draw or anything).

I think our most memorable times were watching our foster son play on one of the hometown soccer teams (The Chicago Spirit) and attending the opening and closing ceremonies with his wife and two daughters. The soccer team did quite well until the final matches. We have included our family (sons and daughters-in-law) in many of our gay activities. The Gay Games was even more special in this sense.

Additionally we had four friends at our house for the week, and helped house several others. These guests were all gay men who were senior citizens, and I am sure they never thought they would get to experience an event of the magnitude of the Gay Games VII. We took these gentlemen (and one was from the south, so he was truly a

southern gentleman) to Naked Boys Singing, a stage production, which for that evening was focused on the Gay Games activities. It was a true highlight of the week.

In summary, we thought the games were exciting to witness. The actual competition and athletics were definitely secondary to the outside social events that supported the games. It was the spontaneous activities that seemed to be the events that had the real lasting meaning.

Bob Dybas

House Parties: Fun Fundraisers

A few house parties are scheduled in the fall months including New York City (646-418-7039, dignityny@aol.com), Columbus, OH (matsonm@aol.com), Seattle (206-325-7314, mjrankin2000@worldnet.att.net), and Chicago (312-458-9438, DignityChicago@aol.com).

Dignity Columbus will be hosting a traveling dinner in October to raise funds for DignityUSA. The evening will feature five courses at the homes of five different members: appetizer, salad, prima plate, secundo plate, and dessert. There will be ten guests at two different seatings with a requested donation of \$75 or more. All guests will end up together at the final location for a celebration of the witness Dignity has provided over nearly 40 years. All proceeds benefit DUSA. The Chapter is currently extending invitations to guests, including people who are potential members of DUSA, and hopes to raise \$1000. Hosts will be Marie and Fred Sweeney, Michael and Norma Tynan, Brian Smith, Paul Keaveney, and MarkMatson/Chris Stringer. For information contact Mark at matsonm@aol.com.

Chicago is taking a different approach. Chapter members will receive a letter asking them to make a gift of \$50 - \$100. Any Chicago member who makes a gift in response to the letter will receive an invitation to a Thanksgiving party in November to honor chapter members who are donors to DignityUSA. The party will be held in the home of Chris Pett and will be co-hosted by Chris and Daniel Bender.

Is there a party for DignityUSA in the works in your



chapter? If you are interested in organizing or hosting a House Party for DignityUSA or want to know how to go about it, contact board members Peggy Burns mgt-burns@comcast.net or Lewis Tanner lewistanner@yahoo.com. We can help you make your party successful!

Dignity Members Honored in San Diego

On Friday, August 18, The San Diego LGBT Community Center celebrated three living inductees for their Wall of Honor. The wall is described as "a landmark commemorative display that recognizes and celebrates those San Diego LGBT community members who have had a significant positive impact on the San Diego LGBT community through their spirit of leadership and commitment." Two of those inductees are Bridget Wilson and Pat McArron, members of the local Dignity chapter.

"This is not only a special moment in my life and that of Bridget's," said Pat McArron, "It is also a special moment in the life of our Dignity community." As both Bridget and Pat currently serve on the local Dignity/San Diego community council, it is fitting that everyone in the Dignity community celebrate with them the LGBT achievements of the past thirty-plus years.

Here are the brief bios included in the LGBT Center Press Release:

Patrick Terence McArron - After struggling to reconcile his Catholic spirituality with his sexuality, McArron has spent more than three decades educating church leaders and counseling LGBT Catholics facing similar struggles. A native San Diegan, McArron co-founded in 1972 the San Diego chapter of DignityUSA, the national organization for LGBT Catholics, where he served as director of the Pacific Region before going on to serve as vice-president and president of the national group. He has created special retreat services for LGBT Catholics, and spearheaded a first-of-its-kind workshop on LGBT issues in the Catholic Church for Catholic and Episcopal priests of local dioceses. In 1979, he helped organize the first LGBT Catholic Convention in San Diego, drawing a crowd of more than 600 people. McArron, who was also involved in establishing the now-defunct Pacific Coast

Times LGBT news magazine, has been with his partner, Glenn, since 1973.

Bridget J. Wilson - One of the founders of The Center, Wilson served in the U.S. Army Reserve from 1977-1980. Before completing law school in 1993, Wilson was a nurse and previously served as staff nurse for Dr. Brad Truax, a previous Wall of Honor inductee. She was a founding member of the University of San Diego School of Law's Gay and Lesbian Law Student Association, and served on the planning committee for San Diego LGBT Pride from 1974-79. In the 1980s, Wilson served on the executive board of the San Diego Democratic Club, and served on the board of AIDS Foundation San Diego, where she had also volunteered for several years in its legal clinic. She was active in the creation of San Diego's LGBT bar association, the Tom Homann Law Association, and served as that group's co-president. But Wilson may be best known for her tireless and effective efforts on behalf of LGBT servicemembers and veterans. She is a charter member of both the San Diego Veterans Association and American Veterans for Equal Rights, and has been consulting counsel to the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network since 1993. Wilson has served in the Judge Advocate division of the California State Military Reserve since 1999, where she is known as Major Wilson, and has won the California Medal of Merit, among other awards. She has been honored for her work by the San Diego Democratic Club, the San Diego AIDS Project and AIDS Assistance Fund, the Military Law Task Force, and Servicemembers Legal Defense Network. She was the 1986 grand marshal for San Diego LGBT Pride.

We are very proud of these members from San Diego, the site, by the way, of the 2009 DignityUSA convention!



Introducing *Seventy Times Seven*, Gay-Themed Novel by a Former Catholic Brother

Salvatore Sapienza's debut novel, *Seventy Times Seven*, is an exploration of religion and homosexuality with a Catholic brother and teacher at its center – as told by a real-life former religious brother and openly gay man.

Set in the early 1990s, the story finds Brother Vito Fortunato a few months from his final vows as a brother in the Catholic Church and at a crossroads, torn between his spirituality and his sexuality as a fully out and proud gay man. As he teaches the boys in his high school religion class, he struggles mightily with his own problems of forgiveness: trying to forgive the Church, the gay community, and most of all, himself. But a summer of volunteer work at an AIDS center in San Francisco – and a love affair with Gabriel, a recently divorced landscaper – has Vito caught squarely between his sexual identity and happiness and the idealism that drives him to try to change the archaic views of the Catholic Church on homosexuality and AIDS.

Pioneering gay author Felice Picano calls *Seventy Times Seven* “real, present and important,” while others acclaim the story as “intriguing,” “blessed with epiphanies,” and “a victory for the gay spirit.” This semi-autobiographical tale is published by Haworth Press and arrived in bookstores in June 2006. The book is available in softcover and retails for \$15.95.

A former religious brother, Sapienza taught high school English and ministered to people with AIDS, working alongside Father Mychal Judge, the New York City fire chaplain who died in the World Trade Center attacks. Sapienza's essay on his experiences with Father Judge is included in the book, *Remembering Father Mychal*, edited by gay writer and activist Brendan Fay. Sapienza was a 2001 Teacher of the Year Nominee and has also written several cover stories for *The Gay and Lesbian Times*. Sapienza currently resides with his partner in the gay resort town of Saugatuck on Lake Michigan, where they own and manage a bed and breakfast.

Special Announcements From New Ways Ministry

Founded in 1977 by our great friends, Sister Jeannine Gramick and Father Robert Nugent, New Ways Ministry, is described as an organization providing "gay positive...advocacy and justice for lesbian and gay Catholics and reconciliation within the larger Christian and civil communities." Their current executive director, Frank DeBernardo, has asked us to inform our DignityUSA members about a few of their upcoming programs.

- **SPIRITUAL SOJOURN TO SOUTHERN SPAIN**
For Friends and Advocates of Lesbian and Gay Catholics. November 2-10, 2006. For information and reservations, contact Sister Jeannine Gramick at 301-864-3604 or send e-mail to gramick@verizon.net.
- **OVERCOMING HETEROSEXISM AND HOMOPHOBIA:**
Supporting Our Lesbian Sisters. Racine, WI, December 8-10, 2006. A weekend conference for vowed women religious who are lesbian, exploring their sexual orientation, religious community leaders, vocation or formation personnel. For more information, call 301-864-3604, e-mail NewWaysM@verizon.net, or write Womanjourney Weavings, 4012 Twenty-ninth Street, Mt. Rainier, MD 20712.
- **NEW WAYS MINISTRY NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM:**
"Outward Signs: Lesbian/Gay Catholics in a Sacramental Church." March 16-18, 2007, Bloomington, MN. This is New Ways' sixth national symposium. Each has been a remarkably scholarly and inspiring event. Plenary sessions for this conference will include a panel of bishops, Brian McNaught, Sister Margaret Farley, RSM, Father Richard McBrien, and Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ. Please contact New Ways using the information above for further details.

