



DIGNITY

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR CATHOLIC HOMOPHILES AND CONCERNED HETEROPHILES

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EDITORIAL

DIGNITY: FROM DREAM TO NATIONAL REALITY

The 1971 International Synod of Catholic Bishops in Rome issued a challenge to every member of the Church: "be prophetic in championing the rights of individuals and groups that are treated unjustly." The assembled bishops stated their recognition that people have a basic right and a human need to participate in the decisions which affect their lives and destinies, a right that is exercised when individuals within a minority organize and enter into dialogue with those in authority.

Gays within the Church are a minority, and treated unjustly. Accordingly, as for any such minority, the Catholic hierarchy and laity must champion their rights. And the members of the minority -- the Gays -- have to organize themselves in order to enter into dialogue with the bishops if they wish to implement their basic right to participate in the decisions that so profoundly affect their lives.

Many Catholic Gays, however, prefer that everything in the line of decision-making be done for them. They would like a statement from the bishops capable of raising the Gay Catholic community to a place beyond the reach of moral turpitude, social bigotry and "legal" injustices. Were that to happen, of course, we would never mature. It is a sign of God's providence that at this time the Church doesn't speak. We have to learn to think for ourselves, to initiate those actions that will ameliorate our condition. What might seem to some as a reprehensible silence on the part of the hierarchy might also be seen as a challenge from Christ to become responsible in those matters that concern Gays as Gays, to become morally and socially mature.

It is our turn to speak now. And when we speak either in our role as prophet or in dialogue, we speak with a powerful force behind us -- the blood and tears of millions of Gays persecuted throughout Christian history. We speak, conscious of the past and knowing that the whole future of the Gay Catholic community rests in our hands.

Over the past Labor Day weekend the City of the Angels witnessed an historical event. For the first time within the Roman Catholic Church's history homosexuals exercised their right to organize as a minority and formed the vehicle through which they can enter into dialogue with the Church, through which they can stand before the Christian body in the role of prophet. They speak now as a national organization -- the Gay community now visible, now audible, now vocal, now responsible and requesting their rightful place in making those decisions that affect their very existence.

DIGNITY's first convention was a beautiful Christian experience, an experience created by laity and clergy, by men and women. The sense of commitment, the tension of giving flesh to ideals brought into being a provisional constitution and provision for a Board of Governors that gives to DIGNITY a truly national dimension. The constitution provides for the equality of both men and woman within the organization so that together those who suffer injustices might work to redress the wrongs of the Church toward Gays in their lives as homosexuals.

Delegates from the Chapters across the country in working sessions, members from every

region assembled in workshops, clergy concelebrating a meaningful liturgy -- all gave evidence of a growing unity, a sense of commitment, a consciousness of group identity.

The passive, persecuted Gay from the Church's past is now in the throes of a spectacular metamorphosis -- active, conscious of an inherent dignity, responsible, ready to demand justice toward the homophile community and anxious to put forth effort to build a world where the Christian ideal of love will flourish.

Many have contributed to the advent of this day, but no one has more beautifully set forth its history and meaning than Fr. John J. McNeill, S.J. in his opening talk at the convention. The very power of his presence gave further impetus to this historical progression. His words have been sown in the hearts of all present and will find expression in the words and actions of DIGNITY as they have already found expression in most of this editorial.

As never before, we must now speak and act as one. As Chapters and Missions, as individuals we must overcome our discouragements with new hope and our tensions with increased awareness of one another. We must provide a durable instrument through which the Church may effectively minister to the special needs of the Gay community. We must bring forth a model community of Christian love that will serve as an example to all the Church.

Through faith we must free ourselves from the past with its imposed sense of guilt and contracted feelings of inferiority, free ourselves from the future with its anxieties, and free ourselves thereby for the present -- to love, to breathe a Christian love through the indwelling Spirit upon all around us.

This issue of the newsletter is somewhat different in format, due to the necessity of delaying its publication until after the convention and the consequent rush to get it into print within the month of September. The next issue will resume the regular features.

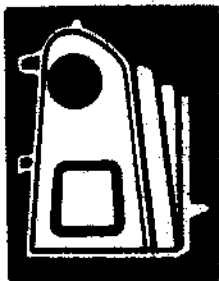


NATIONAL OFFICERS ELECTED

The new provisional constitution states that the three national officers should all be elected from one Chapter, thus facilitating their work for DIGNITY.

As the last matter of business, the delegates voted to give the offices to Boston. They elected as the first Executive Director Paul Diederich (President of DIGNITY/Boston), as the national secretary Fr. Tom Odde, and as the national treasurer John Harnett.

These three will carry the work load of the national office until the National Board of Governors is created and at that time will become the officers of the Board.



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YOUR PATRONAGE WOULD BE APPRECIATED.

CONVENTION LETTERS

Delegates to the convention voted for and accepted three letters to be issued in the name of the convention -- a letter to the bishops of the United States, a copy of that letter together with a cover letter to the superiors of Religious Orders and a letter to the Metropolitan Community Church as printed here.

To the Clergy and Members
of the Metropolitan Community Church

We, the delegates to the first national Convention of DIGNITY, wish to formally extend to our fellow Gay men and women of Metropolitan Community Church an expression of Christian fellowship and love. We appreciate the pioneering work that your church has done in providing for the spiritual needs of Gays who have for so long found themselves unwelcome in the established churches.

We hope to provide within the Roman Catholic Church an atmosphere in which Gay Catholics can feel at home despite our church's long history of opposition to homosexuality. We ask your prayers that we may succeed in this task which appears so formidable. With God's grace we can succeed.

We need your help and fellowship in many ways, and we have found support always from our MCC brothers and sisters in areas where we have been striving to establish DIGNITY Chapters.

We hope that this Christian spirit of cooperation we have experienced with you will always be an example of ecumenical love that can provide a model of Christian unity to the traditional churches as well.

Thank you for your help. We promise you our cooperation and love in return.

Every time a man stands up for his ideals, he sends a small ripple of hope through mankind. (Robert Kennedy)

LETTER FROM THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
TO THE MEMBERS OF DIGNITY

"You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here ..." - Desiderata.

In musing over an introductory letter this passage kept reoccurring to me.

If there's one thing I learned at the Convention it was that there are many, many different people throughout the United States who make up DIGNITY. I heard many different ideas but one thing kept cropping up and that was that there is a place in the Church for the gay person. And this is what DIGNITY is all about.

As gay Catholics we have our own pain to deal with and DIGNITY is here to alleviate, to do away with that pain.

I call upon all members of DIGNITY to spread the word that the Spirit has moved and "gay Catholic" is no longer a contradiction. I call upon the women in DIGNITY to spread consciousness to the membership and to other women that DIGNITY IS! I call upon the men to aid in spreading the word and to make every effort to understand the particular pain of the gay woman in the Church.

Working together and understanding each other in the Spirit we can't help but go on to many, many new days.

In this spirit, as Executive Director, I hope to hear your comments and criticisms and just hear from you in general so that united DIGNITY will accomplish its goals.

In closing, I ask the support of the membership for the proposed Constitution which you are being asked to ratify.

A lot of work went into it and I feel that the best interests of DIGNITY were well represented. I look forward to the next two years working with Tom and Jack and the future Board of Governors to make DIGNITY a strong and viable force in the Church and the gay community. Sincerely yours,

Paul Diederich

CONSTITUTION



I. STATEMENT OF POSITION AND PURPOSE.

- A. We believe that Gay Catholics 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 his temple, and the channel through which the love of God might become 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.
- B. We believe that Gays can express their sexuality in a manner that is consonant with Christ's teaching. We believe that all sexuality should be exercised in an ethically responsible and unselfish way.
- C. As members of DIGNITY we wish to promote the cause of the Gay community. To do this, we must accept our responsibility to the Church, to Society and to individual Gay Catholics.
1. To the Church: to work for the development of its sexual theology and for the acceptance of Gays as full and equal members of the one Christ.
 2. To Society: to work for justice and social acceptance through education and legal reform.
 3. To Individual Gays: to reinforce their self-acceptance and their sense of dignity, and to aid them in becoming more active members of the Church and Society.
- D. DIGNITY is organized to unite all Gay Catholics, to develop leadership and to be an instrument through which the Gay Catholic may be heard by the Church and Society.

There are four areas of concern:

1. **Spiritual Development.** We shall strive to achieve Christian maturity through all the means at our disposal, especially the Mass, the sacraments, personal prayer and active love of neighbor.
2. **Education.** We wish to inform ourselves in all matters of faith as well as in all that concerns the Gay community so that we may develop the maturity of outlook needed to live fulfilling lives in which sexuality and spirituality are integrated, and to prepare us for service in the Gay community.

3. Social Involvement. As Catholics and as members of Society, we shall become involved in those actions that bring the love of Christ to others and provide the basis for social reform.

- a. Toward individuals: We wish to lead a life of service to others, hoping to render visible the love of Christ and contributing our share to building a community of love.
- b. With Gay groups: We wish to work with other Gay groups for the cause of justice to the Gay community and for the promotion of a sense of solidarity.
- c. With religious and secular groups: We wish to work with them that they may better understand Gays and recognize present injustices.

4. Social Events. Activities of a social and recreational nature will be provided to promote an atmosphere where friendships can develop and mature, and where the Gay's sense of acceptance and dignity may be strengthened.

II. Membership. Membership in DIGNITY shall be open to all Catholics, clergy and laity, and to all other persons who subscribe to the DIGNITY Statement of Position and Purpose and are members of local Chapters or Missions or are members at large. A minimal national annual dues will be assessed each Chapter or Mission for every active member. Members' at large dues will be paid directly to the National Board. ~~National dues shall be \$2 per year. They may be increased~~ by action of the Board of Governors with the concurrence of the Chapters and Missions. Members may subscribe to the National newsletter at an annual rate which is less than the rate for non-members by an amount equal to the annual dues.

III. Organization.

A. Board of Governors.

1. Board Membership. Each Chapter and Mission will elect two representatives to the national Board, one woman and one man, who shall serve at the group's discretion. If no woman or man chooses to run, then only one from that Chapter or Mission will be represented on the National Board of Governors. Existing Chapters and Missions shall elect their representatives to the Board of Governors by January 1974.

2. Duties and Responsibilities. The Board of Governors shall coordinate the activities of DIGNITY and be the means of communication among the Chapters and Missions. It shall establish and implement national policy. This Board shall be the Chartering authority and the final appeal Board in all matters. The National Newsletter shall be under the direction of the Board of Governors.

3. Officers.

a. National Officers. The officers of DIGNITY National shall be the Executive Director, Treasurer and Secretary. Officers shall be elected by the delegates at the national convention for a period of two years. These officers may be eligible for a second two-year term. All three officers must come from the same Chapter or Mission. All officers shall serve as ex officio

members of the Board of Governors.

b. Duties of the National Officers shall be as follows:

1). Executive Director:

- a). To call and preside over all meetings of the Board of Governors and the national convention.
- b). To arrange the agenda for the above meetings.
- c). To serve as ex officio member of all national committees.
- d). To represent personally or delegate another as representative in any matter pertaining to DIGNITY.
- e). To assume responsibility for all publicity relating to DIGNITY.

2). Treasurer:

- a). To take the place of the Executive Director in the Executive Director's absence.
- b). To serve as ex officio member of all committees.
- c). To see that accurate records of receipts and disbursements are kept.
- d). To submit a financial report at each Board of Governors meeting and a certified professional audit at the national convention.

3). Secretary:

- a). To take the place of the Executive Director in the absence of the Treasurer.
- b). To see that the minutes of all Board of Governors meetings and the national convention minutes are kept.
- c). To circulate the minutes of the above within two weeks or in the subsequent issue of the national newsletter.
- d). To keep on file as permanent records all materials relating to DIGNITY.
- e). To send out notices of Board of Governors meetings.

c. Election of officers and delegates.

- 1). The election of officers shall be held every two years at the national convention.
- 2). Officers are elected by authorized delegates sent to the national convention by the Chapters and Missions.
- 3). Each Chapter and Mission of DIGNITY shall send two delegates to the national convention and each delegation shall have one vote for every member of the local Chapter or Mission.
- 4). If the delegation does send two delegates, one must be a man and one must be a woman.

d. If any national officer cannot complete his or her office, the Board of Governors will elect a replacement who will hold the office until the next national convention.

4. Committees.

The Board shall establish committees as needed from within its own membership and/or the membership of DIGNITY at large in order to implement the policies and program of DIGNITY nationally.

B. Chapters, Missions and Members at large.

1. **Chapters.** A Chapter shall consist of a group of at least twenty-five dues paying members, chartered by the National Board of Governors after functioning under Chapter rules for a period of at least six months. Chapters with fewer than twenty-five members recognized prior to the date of the first DIGNITY national convention (August 31, September 1, 2, and 3, 1973) shall continue to receive full Chapter status.



Chapter By-Laws must be consistent with the Constitution and By-Laws of DIGNITY/National.

2. **Missions.** A Mission is a group of members who are meeting with the expressed intention of forming a Chapter, or a group that consists of fewer than twenty-five members.

3. **Members at large.** People not living in the area of a Chapter or Mission may become members by paying dues to the National Office. The Board of Governors shall be responsible for the nurture of these members.

IV. Meetings.

A. There shall be a national convention every two years.

B. The Board of Governors shall meet at least once prior to the national convention and at any other time when requested by half of the Board's membership.

C. The National Officers of DIGNITY should meet monthly.

D. At Board of Governors meetings one half shall constitute a quorum.

V. **Parliamentary Authority.** The authority for all rules of procedure at national meetings and for the answers to questions of parliamentary law shall be the "Roberts Rules of Order."

VI. **Amending the Constitution.** This constitution can be amended by delegates at a national convention provided the proposed amendment has been previously submitted in writing to the Board of Governors at least six months prior to national conventions, for discussion within the Chapters and Missions and approved by two-thirds vote of the Board of Governors. Two-thirds of the votes cast from among the membership of DIGNITY/National shall be necessary for ratification of an amendment.

Two-thirds of the votes cast by December 1, 1973 from among the membership of DIGNITY shall be necessary for ratification of this constitution. Once ratified, this constitution shall be in effect for two years or until a permanent constitution is adopted. This constitution will go into effect immediately upon a majority vote of the delegates to the 1973 national convention to be effective until December 1, 1973. By that time

this constitution must be ratified by the above procedure.

If this constitution fails to be ratified, the officers elected by the 1973 national convention will continue in office under the operating procedures of the former Administrative Services Group until such time as a new temporary constitution can be submitted to the members.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The October newsletter will resume its usual Letters to the Editor.

Now that DIGNITY has come of age, now that we are becoming a force to be reckoned with and a voice that speaks for the Gay Catholic community, it is urgent that DIGNITY members express themselves.

If DIGNITY is to speak for the Catholic community, the national officers and the Board of Governors must know how the members feel about various issues. We, therefore, urge you to share your thought with us in this newsletter, trying to keep the letter brief and to the point (we are severely limited as to space), giving reasons for views where possible. (Names will not be printed unless requested.)



It is particularly important that members who are not affiliated with a Chapter or Mission express themselves. You are a part of DIGNITY as much as the Chapter or Mission member. If we are to serve your needs, if we are to speak for you, we must know your thoughts. Let's all do our share to make this column a forum that will represent all opinions on all issues and give us a way to know the thinking of the Gay Catholic community. It will be a great service to those who lead DIGNITY and are committed to serving our needs, to speaking on our behalf. It will be a great service to the rest of the Church, enabling them to understand us better -- hierarchy, clergy and laity.

★AAAA QUICKIES AAAA★

Tapes of Fr. McNeill's talk at the convention and tapes of the workshops are being prepared. Further information will be given later. If you have a change of address, let us know. Your vote on the ratification of the Constitution is important. VOICE! You are part of a rapidly maturing Gay Catholic community. What do Gay Catholics think about various issues that affect them?

Speak up. Write a letter to the editor. If we don't express ourselves, who will know how we feel? This newsletter is the only forum of Gay Catholic thought published nationally. Three excellent officers have been elected to guide DIGNITY for the next two years. We look for great things to come from Boston. Has anyone developed and used a liturgy for the blessing of the union of two lovers? Send a copy to the newsletter.

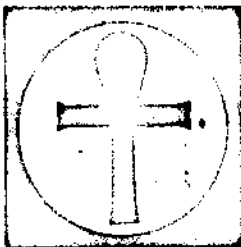
RATIFICATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

The Constitution printed in this issue is proposed as a temporary one, to be used for two years or until such a time as a permanent one can be provided.

This Constitution will go into effect on December 1, 1973, only if 2/3 of those who vote favor it. We make a special plea to each member of DIGNITY to read the Constitution carefully. Use the cut off portion on p. 10 as your ballot. Send it to your local Chapter or Mission if you are affiliated with one, otherwise send it to the national office (address in right hand column).

Should you vote against ratification, it would help the Constitution committee in drafting the permanent Constitution if they knew your reasons. In that way they can better prepare a Constitution that will meet with majority thinking. Whether for or against, you might wish to indicate what points you would like to see retained in the permanent Constitution. Please send such information with your ballot, and do so at your earliest opportunity.

THOUGHT



They say every organization is a body structured from four kinds of bones: the wishbones who spend all their time wishing someone else would do the work;

the jawbones who do all the talking but little else; the knucklebones who knock everything anybody else tries to do; and the backbones who get under the load and do most of the work.



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Address mail concerning DIGNITY Chapters or Missions to area of interest:

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DIGNITY/Boston, 1105 Boylston St., Boston, MA 02215.

DIGNITY/Chicago, P.O. Box 11261, Chicago, IL 60611.

DIGNITY/Cincinnati, P.O. Box 463, Florence, KY 41042.

DIGNITY/Cleveland, P.O. Box 46561, Cleveland, OH 44146.

DIGNITY/Long Beach, P.O. Box 7305, Long Beach, CA 90807.

DIGNITY/Louisville, P.O. Box 8202, Louisville, KY 40208.

DIGNITY/Los Angeles, P.O. Box 6161, Los Angeles, CA 90055.

DIGNITY/New York-New Jersey, P.O. Box 742, Summit, NJ 07901.

DIGNITY/San Diego, P.O. Box 19071, San Diego, CA 92119.

DIGNITY/Washington, D.C., c/o Apt. 204, 215 "C" St., S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003.

For all other areas write to: DIGNITY/National Office, 755 Boylston St., Room 514, Boston, MA 02116.

Love is giving your lover room to grow.



"Should the Church reach out to people regardless of their way of living? . . . The Church—perhaps more than any other institution in society—represents morality, judgment about right or wrong, and in the minds of many people, condemnation. Is it time that the Church also became known for love, concern, forgiveness, and acceptance?

"Is it the responsibility of the Church to reach out to homosexual persons, fully recognizing that perhaps many homosexuals either will not or cannot change their sexual orientation? . . .

"Our Lord always stressed the importance of the quality of relations between people. Should not the Church likewise be concerned with the inner worth of all relations, whether heterosexual or homosexual? Does not the Church have a responsibility to help people understand that punitive measures alienate people and do not help them develop the quality of their relationships?"

From a working paper, "Christianity and Human Sexuality: A Look at the Church's Stance and Its Relevance to Our Existing Culture and to Man's New Self-Understanding," prepared by the Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs and the Executive Council of The Episcopal Church.

"The Council for Christian Social Action hereby declares its opposition to all laws which make private homosexual relations between consenting adults a crime and thus urges their repeal.

"The CSA also expresses its opposition to the total exclusion of homosexuals from public employment and from enlistment and induction into the Armed Forces, especially the dismissal by less than honorable discharges from the Armed Forces for homosexual practices with consenting adults in private. . . .

"The CSA also opposes, where they exist, police practices of entrapment and enticement in their attempts to enforce laws against homosexual practices and solicitation.

"Finally, the CSA encourages the UCC Conferences, Associations, and local churches to hold seminars, consultations, conferences, etc., for honest and open discussion of the nature of homosexuality in our society."

This statement is a resolution adopted by the Council for Christian Social Action, United Church of Christ, April, 1969.

The item above and to the left appeared in the July/August 1973 issue of TRENDS (a Presbyterian publication) -- devoted exclusively to the topic of homosexuality.

Getting out of ourselves and into the needs of others can unlock our own creativity and light a few candles in a darkened world. "Always seek to do good to one another" (1Thess. 5:15).



OFFICIAL BALLOT

I vote

FOR

ratification of the proposed national Constitution.

AGAINST