


 Special Focus Issue

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SEXUAL ETHICS DOCUMENT ISSUED

CULMINATES
SIX-YEAR
EFFORTby Nate Gruel, Chair
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On the weekend of May 17-19, 1985, ten members of Dignity met together in San Francisco to begin the process of fulfilling the mandate of a motion passed by the House of Delegates in Seattle in 1983. That mandate was "in partial recognition of Dignity's twentieth anniversary, to present a document to the Executive House of Delegates for approval at that body's meeting on the occasion of the 1989 National Convention."

Out of that first meeting, the Task Force on Sexual Ethics issued the following message to the entire Dignity membership: "As members of your Task Force on Sexual Ethics, our first act is to address ourselves to the prayer, reflection, and study that are essential to success. With the guidance and support of Jesus' Spirit, we can discern together and dedicate ourselves to an expression of our sexuality 'in a manner that is

consonant with Christ's teaching.' We commit ourselves to listening to you and to your experience."

Over four and a half years have passed since that first meeting. During that time, the Task Force met eight times, visiting the cities of New York, Vancouver, Philadelphia, Chicago, Miami, Indianapolis, and Cincinnati. An initial draft of the document was presented to the Dignity membership in Miami in July, 1987, and a final edition was completed in March, 1989, under the careful scrutiny of a professional editor.

Within the pages of this special edition of the Dignity/USA national newsletter, the Task Force is grateful and proud to pass on to you its final report — "Sexual Ethics - Experience, Growth, Challenge." The House of Delegates voted in San Francisco this past August to "fully accept and endorse the document. . . ."

It should be noted and emphasized that in reality what the Dignity membership has thereby accepted and endorsed is nothing other than

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Pictured above are members of the Sexual Ethics Task Force. (Not shown are Jim D., Ed Dempsey, Wayne W., and Sue W.)

its own lived experience. It was at the Vancouver meeting in February, 1986, that the Task Force determined to take a decisively non-authoritarian, non-hierarchical approach to dealing with the subject of sexual ethics. The operative principle here was that the Church must be instructed by the lived experience of its people. The Task Force also decided, however, not to see the hierarchy as the primary audience of the document.

Instead, the document was defined as communication from the people of God to the people of God. As such, the document was seen as filling a pastoral role, and was therefore intended to be a source of "conscience formation and spiritual growth." It was to that end that the Task Force set itself to the task of listening to the Dignity membership via the two survey sources which it had developed. The end result, we be-