



Discussion Recording Form

Date: 1/22/18

Chapter or Community: DignityUSA At Large Members – via Teleconference

SEGMENT ONE: RECALLING OUR ROOTS

Facilitator / Recorder Worksheet

1. What was the initial need that DignityUSA was organized to meet and that drove our rapid growth from a local community in L.A. to a national network of chapters? What “fueled our engine”?

The first national office was in Boston. There was a national component even when there were only 4 chapters. Bill B was in Denver where there was no local presence. “We thought we would be out of business in 20 years because we would engage the Church in discussion and things would change and that would be that. There was an optimism then.”

DUSA did not include Bisexual and Transgender people initially. It was Gay and Lesbian ministry.

There was a fast growth of chapters and the Church was largely supportive which was remarkable. We were meeting in parishes.

Bill B attended a conference at Nergamo Retreat Center in Dayton Ohio intended to support those who ministered to gay and lesbian Catholics. Initiated by a Marianist Brother – Fr. Norm Brochner (sp?). “This was the first time something like this had ever happened!” “I was living in Boulder, CO and attended the Newman Center at the Univ of Colorado. I was asked to represent them at this conference, so I went. I met lots of wonderful people. This happened just after Dignity opened its national office in Boston. Brian M was there. He had just been fired by the Catholic newspaper in Detroit for coming out.” Bill believes the % of women at this conference was less than 20%.

Religious communities were generally quite supportive at the time – even leading.

We discussed the seismic shift that happened after the “Halloween Letter” from the Vatican was issued in October 1986. This eventually resulted in the withdrawal of hospitality to Dignity groups to meet on Church Property. It was noted that this put many parishes and religious communities in a very awkward space. The chapter in Dayton was largely affiliated with the Marianists at the Univ of Dayton, who were dead



Discussion Recording Form

set against moving off Church property. Marie S noted that the Dignity group at the Newman Center at Ohio State University in Columbus changed names to the “Gay Men’s Support Group”. The Newman staff were forced to make this change or risk being defunded by the local Bishop.

In the Church at the time, there was a growth in movements toward grass-roots communities. There were many social change movements going on in the US as well. Women religious were moving into leadership roles. Rome felt threatened by all this and felt they had to clamp down. In Chicago, Cardinal Bernadin had been supportive. “ he was both progressive and political. Rome instructed the Bishops to take control. Our chapter had to step back and reflect. We decided that the cost of accepting Church teaching about homosexuality – the price of admission – was too high. We moved to a Lutheran Church.”

“This was a watershed event not just for us but for the Church. Up to then no lay organization had said “NO” to the hierarchy and didn’t become a separate Church. Dignity has always tried to remain within the Catholic community while honoring our own personal dignity and challenging the theological thinking at the time. This paved the way for the organization we were to become.

Mary H was in Chicago. “I remember there were few women but I felt embraced by everyone. They quickly became like family. I was in a safe setting for the first time. I didn’t focus on gender. Women were welcome but they tended to come and go. The people there were very supportive of me.

(It was noted that the subject of gender in Dignity could be a topic all its own.)

2. How did the mission of Dignity evolve over time? What drove those changes in how we did our work? Consider dynamics in the organization, in the Church, and in society. In what ways might your chapter/community/caucus have contributed to this evolution?

No additional discussion added to what is recorded above.



Discussion Recording Form

3. The theme of our 50th Anniversary Conference is “True to the Spirit, True to Ourselves”. In what ways has “being true to ourselves and true to the calling of the Spirit” evident in our history? Your local history?

N/A

4. Locally, and nationally, how has Dignity changed lives for the better? Changed the Catholic community? Impacted the LGBTQ social justice movement?

Agreed we will take that up next time.