

Dignity Denver's Jubilee Discussion One

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Date: October 29, 2017

Chapter: Dignity Denver

Question 1. The Denver Chapter was fortunate to have Mark Matson visiting the chapter a few weeks prior to the scheduled discussion. Since Mark is one of the coordinators of the Jubilee process, he was able to give the attendees at our regularly scheduled Sunday Liturgy a history of how this process came about and what is the hoped for outcome of the process.

There were 23 participants at the first discussion on October 29th, 2017. Our Moderator briefly summarized the comments made by Mark Matson to the community a few weeks earlier. He then also gave brief historical comments on the initial meetings in Southern California being held by Fr Patrick Nidorf, an Augustinian priest and psychologist, who was holding meetings in response to the comments he was receiving in counseling sessions with gay people. Gay people were raising unresolved ethical questions and having struggles identified with the Catholic Church. At that point, the focus shifted to asking all the participants why they started coming to Dignity.

Reasons for finding Dignity were multiple and diverse. But as the participants explained their unique reasons, general categories were revealed.

- Heard a friend was attending and wanted to find out "what was that about"
- Had met John McNeill in New York City and liked what was being said
- Dignity Denver had a reputation of having great music
- Invited by friends to attend
- Enjoyed people socializing
- Wanted a place of worship that allowed people to be openly gay
- Advertising by the chapter had intrigued curiosity
- Migrated from an Ecumenical church that condemned to a church of acceptance
- Wanted an organization that had a component of social activism and advocated change
- A bisexual person wanting to find a connection – a group that was open
- Wanted a group that accepted divorced Catholics
- There was a societal need to address the needs of AIDS patients
- A place with non-judgmental atmosphere

Question 2. Dignity Denver's mission started very clearly as a worshipping community in the basement of the basilica welcomed by the local archbishop shortly after its founding. A list of priests was provided to Dignity who would be interested in serving as celebrants and serving as both counselors and confessors. The chapter continued in that mode for quite some time.

In the early 1980's timeframe, the basement of the basilica was needing to be remodeled and the Denver chapter was requested to temporarily move out of the basement. The chapter found a meeting place at the Capitol Heights Presbyterian church where it joined two other worshipping communities: Presbyterians and the 10:30 Catholic community, a Vatican II community. After construction was completed at the basilica, the chapter had an opportunity to return to the church basement. But for a number of reasons (including the fact that access for the disabled at Capitol Heights was much better), the chapter chose to remain at Capitol Heights. This decision proved to be prophetic.

In 1986, when Dignity Chapters around the country were forced off of church property due to the "Halloween Letter", DD was spared the trauma for it had "struck out on its own" earlier and was grateful to have a welcoming atmosphere where it continued its liturgies and other educational and social activities. It never looked back!

The change of meeting locations proved somewhat of catalyst for the chapter's increased social and public advocacy activities. By the time Pope John Paul II arrived in Denver for World Youth Day in 1993, the chapter was ready to hold demonstrations and educational activities, culminating with a worship service on the steps of Colorado's capitol building. We were ready to show the youth of the world that the Catholic church was not going to quietly avoid LGBT persons: "*Voices that Challenge*" was the campaign.

Question 3. "*Voices that Challenge*" was just one of the movements by which DD evolved over the years. In 1992, when the Vatican sent out notices to the bishops that they should oppose civil laws for Gay people, chapter representatives met with the local archbishop to object to the assault on our civil rights. We formed an outreach project to send speakers to other churches; we participated fully in gay rights marches; and in general became more willing to speak out on our own.

By the early 2000's, Dignity Denver was having both facultied and non-facultied priests leading our liturgies. The local archdiocese attempted to stop facultied priests from ministering to us. Through meeting with the archbishop, the chapter resisted the institutional church's attempt to curtail its activities. The Spirit fueled the chapter's mission.

Question 4. About 10 years ago, the Denver chapter was blessed to have a number of transgendered members join our worshipping community. Their attendance served as an educational tool for the entire chapter. They brought a new awareness to the chapter of the discrimination, ignorance and violence so prevalent in our society regarding their struggles. The chapter grew in its' activities to educate and inform itself and the greater community upon the injustice and violence rained upon transgender persons.