



Discussion Recording Form

Date: February 15, 2018

Chapter or Community: Dignity Boston, founded 1972.

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”?

Question reframed for our community: Why was Dignity/Boston formed? What community or individual needs did the formation of Dignity/Boston meet?

- Members from the 1970s spoke about the need for a safe and welcoming space to receive sacraments.
- Throughout the history of Dignity/Boston, members were aware of the relative percentage of men and women. At times, this was close to 50/50, and at other times was as wide as 95/5, favoring men.
- Dignity/Boston was initially connected to the Interfaith service on Beacon Street. It was made up of gay men and lesbians, as well as other people who felt disenfranchised by the institutional Church, such as divorced persons or women who were abused by their partners.
- When Dignity/Boston took over the liturgy from the Interfaith group, there was a formal document of the stipulations of the agreement, including that the group not be limited to gay and lesbian people.
- Dignity/Boston’s liturgy took place on the first Sunday of every month at a gay bar called the Randolph Country Club, in Randolph, MA.
- Selected quote: “A life without Christ is no life at all.”
- Selected quote: “Dignity started as a way of creating a safe place where LGBT (really mostly gay men at the beginning) folks of Catholic faith could come. Many felt ashamed, guilty, sinful because of being gay and believed God did not want them or find them worthy. Dignity gave them the message that they were loved and welcomed by God. I believe that Dignity has healed and made whole more individuals than any civil rights law did later. Dignity also offered GLBT folks a place to be together, feel support, find companionship, and be social - as an alternative to the bars. The only alternative back then! Dignity became the only family for many.” – Member who joined in the 1970s.



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Note: In our community conversation, we asked a question about the gifts that members brought during our early years that helped us to thrive and gifts that members of our community bring now that sustain as a faith community. See Appendix 1 for their responses.

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?

Question reframed for our community: How did the mission and work of Dignity/Boston change in the 1970s? 1980s? 1990s? 2000s? In what ways did the institutional church affect these changes?

- There was tension in the 1980s and 1990s between Dignity/Boston members who were looking to reconcile with the institutional Church and members who were concerned with wider justice issues and did not want to reconcile. There were "two communities." The rift in the community often fell along gender lines. Many men left Dignity/Boston at this time due to this conflict. One member described this as the difference between being a community "in exile" and a community "in exodus."
- The AIDS crisis had a significant effect on Dignity/Boston. One view is that it made some people resistant to change because Dignity was their home. It also deepened members' commitment to each other and the community worked through significant challenges. Many members were lost to the epidemic.
- The AIDS crisis also affected Dignity/Boston's pastoral care and political agenda. Dignity/Boston buried people who died of AIDS and visited and cared for the sick.
- About a decade ago, the community felt a turning point as more openly transgender people joined.
- There was a conversation at one point about whether or not Dignity/Boston should ordain people. Then, we recognized lay-led liturgies led by people of all genders. Some members left at this point, others felt affirmed in having waited and worked for this change for a long time.
- In the 1980s, Dignity/Boston was a way for people to "speak out" against discrimination. We became the voice of pro-equality Catholics.
- Outreach was always important to Dignity/Boston, such as the Friday Night Supper Program. Dignity/Boston helped gay Cubans refugees to acclimate to life here.

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- Selected quote: “With time, GLBT folks became more accepted in general and many felt that Dignity was not the only place where they could have safe space and create community. That saw the numbers in Dignity chapters go down. For others, of course, the Church will never be inclusive enough as long as sacraments are denied to those openly GLBTQ, so Dignity will always need to exist. Leadership in Dignity has been inspired enough to realize that the initial mission of changing minds inside the hierarchical Church be the main goal. And that our "gayness" was not the only thing we had to fight for. The current mission of Dignity to look at our place in the larger social justice fight in our society and to join with other marginalized groups to demand inclusivity, equality, and justice is the mission closest to our faith. It is, I believe, what gives life to Dignity and how/why Dignity gives life to so many.”
- Selected quote: “I think our goal, whether or not clear in the beginning, was to create a space welcoming to all who believed without judgment. We’ve had many a folk walk through our doors, open to all. We became family for those with none or who were rejected for who they were.”

In what ways did Dignity/Boston affect the local institutional church?

- After the sex abuse scandal, Dignity/Boston's model of liturgy was something that others noticed and identified with.
- Dignity/Boston was a voice of LGBTQI Catholics working for marriage equality.
- Many priests who were visiting Boston or attending school in Boston would come to Dignity/Boston for a time. These priests received a list of rules from the Boston Archdiocese including instructions to stay away from Dignity/Boston.
- A "Team Bernie" group met with Cardinal Law and convinced him to speak out against violence against gay and lesbian people.
- Dignity/Boston was heavily involved in the New England chapter of Call to Action starting in the 1990s.
- The executive director of Dignity/USA is a member of Dignity/Boston, and so we read her words in the newspaper and mainstream Catholics read her words in local papers.
- Selected quote: “The more that the official church has reinforced exclusivity, rejection, and lack of welcome to us and other groups (women come to mind especially) the more that Dignity has a place in our society. We have to continue bringing our lives, relationships, faith, and commitment to equality out in the open. The telling of our stories liberates many still from shame and loneliness. And our witness to what is wrong when the Church does not live up to Jesus' commands is necessary and imperative.”



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- Selected quote: “I am sure we have influenced many individual minds. I have yet to see significant changes in the hierarchical church as a whole. In my lifetime? Not sure.”

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?

Question reframed for our community: The theme of DignityUSA 50th Anniversary Conference is "True to the Spirit, True to Ourselves". In what ways have the Holy Spirit and living our truths been part of the history of Dignity/Boston?

- Many members spoke of the feeling of community that they felt and feel at Dignity/Boston, often for the first time in a Church.
- Over the years, we have had many members who are not Roman Catholic.
- Dignity/Boston has been a place where family members can come.
- Dignity/Boston has been a part of public sacramental moments, such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. There is a feeling of the grace of the Holy Spirit when we gather.
- Selected quote: “The Holy Spirit has led us as a community through difficult times, when church leaders and politicians have targeted us, when our progress seems slow or stalled, when hope is thin, when we are concerned about all the work there is to do and too few volunteers to do it, when the church where we met closed and we needed to find a new home. We always recovered from these difficult times.”
- Selected quote: “I am sure that is why we continue to be a strong, faithful, and vibrant community.”

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

Question reframed for our community: In what ways has Dignity/Boston impacted the social justice movements over time (LGBTQI and others)?

- Dignity/Boston has been actively and productively involved for many years in Harbor to the Bay (which has raised more than \$500,000 for HIV/AIDS care, research and advocacy), Arthritis Walk, AIDS Walk, marches on Washington, Boston Pride, connection to the Tiffany Club (transgender persons) in Waltham
- The fight for marriage equality, and earlier civil rights efforts for hate crimes protection, equality in foster care and adoption, workplace non-discrimination.
- In the 1970s and 1980s, Dignity/Boston ran a telephone hotline that people would staff voluntarily to help answer peoples' questions about being gay and Catholic, and to help people get support that they needed.
- We also had a vibrant couple's ministry; this was most active in the years prior to marriage equality.
- In the 2000s, Dignity/Boston was a listed resource by the Commonwealth Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth in materials distributed statewide to schools for parents of GLBT children.
- In the 1990s, we had a spiritual life ministry that spurred the creation of the Men's and Women's Spirituality Groups which still meet today.
- Dignity/Boston hosted Saturday workshops on theology, Catholic social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion in the 1980s and 1990s. The 1980s version was called "CCD for Subversives."
- Dances and parties – people met each other and had fun, formed relationships.
- Selected quote: "We live in a world where having more gets you even more. It's hard not to get caught up in that cycle. Dignity gives me the opportunity to step out of that cycle and try to live the Gospel. "
- Selected quote: "DignityUSA and Dignity/Boston have shown that you can work for justice rooted in Catholic teaching and that we as LGBTQI people bring passion, commitment, faith, authenticity and strength to the work."
- Selected quote: "We have had a very strong presence in Boston and MA. And have joined other GLBT organization's fighting for equality through the years making sure our message joined that of other groups. Visibility, commitment, "loudness", involvement at so many levels, always as a witness of our faith. Those long civil rights fights in the 80's and in the freedom to marry coalitions come to mind. Our generous contributions to agencies that advocate for AIDS, the hungry and homeless, the sick, the ones outside the margins come to mind as another

way in which we are visible and transmitting a message of faithful Gospel witness as a GLBTQI community of faith.”

SEGMENT ONE – Appendix 1

1A. What were some of the gifts that members brought that helped us to thrive in the early years?

- Resilience
- Courage
- Willingness to grow and change
- The voice of Christ
- Networking across country
- People who were serious about blending their faith and lived gay experience
- Comfortable space and not feeling guilty
- Deep belief in Vatican II
- Established the tradition of excellent music
- Courage!
- Willingness to be a base for emerging gay organizations
- Ordained men shared ministry
- Progressive theology, preaching, liturgical skills
- We were blessed from the beginning with musical gifts
- Compassion for one another
- Welcome hospitality to women
- Ministry, music, spirituality, time, talent and treasure
- Selected quote: “Many ordained men came to Dignity for the same reasons as lay people, but they were able to offer their ministry so that Dignity could become a place where folks could come to Mass without feeling shame or embarrassment, or fear of exposure. We cannot underestimate the power of that. The women of the early offered a very special gift as they started to make Dignity communities conscious not only of the gifts that women could bring, but also the changes the communities could and should make in order to become more inclusive.

1b What are the gifts that members bring now that will help sustain us in the future?

- Openness to expanding our definitions of inclusivity
- Diversity of identities – people who come for a different reason (for example, parent of a transgender son)

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- Common causes and uncommon to continually challenge each other
- Voice – courage to speak out
- Voices that challenge
- Commitment to each other
- Gift of social justice
- Musical talent!
- A fabulous choir and accompanists
- Inclusivity
- Energy
- Sense of humor
- Expanding inclusion and invitation of welcome
- Lay presiding, as well as ordained
- Inclusive liturgical ministries; i.e. presiders and homilists
- Robust commitment to justice
- Music – musical ability and contributing
- Welcoming
- Their history to add to ours makes us richer and more compassionate
- Commitment
- Our allies and families
- Faith
- Core of people that identify as progressive is a gift
- Passion for social justice
- Emphasis on inclusivity
- Caring
- Strong finances
- Diversity of backgrounds and experiences
- Ample financial assistance/generous contributions
- Friendliness
- Community – having the opportunity to network
- Spread the ethos of Dignity to St. Stephen's and Ethiopian community that meets here and others
- Determination
- Strength
- Hindsight
- Music
- Music Ministry
- Gift of challenging me to expand my thinking



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- History and memory
- Acceptance
- Return to original stance of all people, through outreach and encouragement
- Joy
- Feminism
- Radical hearts
- Grace
- Living out in the world
- Courage to speak the truth
- LGBTQ justice-makers
- My baptism is very special to me.
- Warms smiles and friendly, engaging welcomes
- Love the communion