

Sharing Our Story

**dignity
detroit**

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ROYAL OAK, MI 48068

**Joseph Lempicki
May, 2016**

DIGNITY DETROIT

Founded May 11, 1974

Dignity is a national organization whose definition is described as:

DignityUSA works for respect and justice for people of all sexual orientations, genders, and gender identities—especially gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons—in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy, and support.

In [local chapters](#) across the United States, we worship openly with other GLBT and supportive Catholics, socialize, share personal and spiritual concerns, and work together on educational and justice issues.

We believe that God created us, Christ died for us, and the Holy Spirit sanctified us in Baptism. **As GLBT Catholics, it is our right, our privilege, and our duty to live the sacramental life of the Church.** We believe that we can express our sexuality in a loving, life-affirming manner that is in keeping with Christ's teaching.

To pen a history of the organization is to know where we came from, who we are, and what we plan to continue to be in the future.

On May 11, 1974 six men met and began the journey to establish the organization you see today. Brian McNaught, a journalist for the Michigan Catholic found that there was no diocesan support for a liaison or outreach to the community and requested to be chartered by the national organization. The national office supplied eleven names of interested persons and the chapter was formed. Fr. Sam Campbell, then associate pastor of Most Holy Trinity Parish, on Sixth Street and Porter in the historic Corktown District, became the first chaplain. A home was sought and a woman, Gracie Lee, was looking to rent an upper flat at 2846 17th Street not far from Fr. Campbell's parish. This became the first office Dignity/Detroit was to occupy. Because of the garish paint color, the first home was affectionately termed the "Pink Palace". A casual dinner between the movers of Brian's furniture, the Church, in the person of Fr. Sam and the community, in the person of Gracie Lee set the tone for a connection that Dignity enjoys to this day. The end of June in that very first year, Dignity united with the greater Detroit gay/lesbian community, marching in the gay pride march down Woodward Avenue. In late

summer of 1974, Brian was fired from his staff position at the Michigan Catholic due to his "coming out" in a published article directly in opposition to the church's stand on homosexuality. This act made national news, unified the chapter and drew supporters. On Labor Day of 1974 over 200 priests, religious and laity attended a Mass to express their solidarity with Brian and his struggle to right an injustice to human rights. The first liturgy was in the upper flat with a pot or two of yellow tulips, a few attendees, Fr. Sam and a bucket of chicken for the social. After the events of that Labor Day Mass and subsequent march to the stairs of the Chancery office liturgy moved to the altar at Most Holy Trinity Church. Dignity had a home and a community to service.

At Most Holy Trinity Parish we were finally feeling at home and welcomed. Our offices moved from Brian's house to the convent building which we shared with the few women religious still in residence. Since the parish has an outreach to the homeless it was common to share our liturgy, after mass socials and special events with the homeless who came to our welcoming door. The Sunday liturgy at 6:00pm was well known and open to all. Fr. Clement Kern, pastor of the community, helped us to become represented on the Parish Council. The members immersed themselves into the needs of the parish. Saturdays would find us cleaning the church or planting flowers, working on the convent garden and remodeling the space with demolition of walls and new fencing. Many holidays would be spent with the other organizations serving meals to the homeless. Some worked in the still existing free clinic and we continued to tithe and donate to the maintenance of this historic structure. We remained in that community for twenty three years. In 1997 we were challenged by some restrictions that were being asked of us and demanded in order for us to continue at that location. Our office would have to be moved, our banner could no longer be in the sanctuary at the 6 PM liturgy, no bulletins could be distributed and money collected would be given to the parish. With thoughtfulness, prayers and the integrity of the organization in mind a decision was to be made. In 1997, Dignity accepted the invitation of the Sister Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary to move its liturgy to the Sacred Heart Chapel at Marygrove College, Six Mile and Wyoming. In the years that have followed we have had the strong support of the college, its president and our members and we have had a new home and the 6 PM liturgy went on without interruption. Before leaving Corktown, members marched with a floral wreath of tribute to the statue of the, now deceased, Fr. Clement Kern, on Porter and Trumbull and said good bye and Thank You to our strongest supporter and friend.

Charity has always been a hallmark of Dignity/Detroit's ministry. Various times in the year Dignity members respond with vigor and

overwhelming generosity. Canned goods have always been collected for food pantries or organizations that provide holiday packages for the less fortunate. Clothing is collected and dispersed to groups who are in need. Toiletries and personal care items are packaged and given to AIDS agencies, homeless shelters or gay/lesbian outreach programs. A holiday Giving Tree is set up yearly to hold ornaments that represent the needs of families from the parishes serviced by the men who preside at our weekly liturgy services. Candy is collected and given to the Capuchin soup kitchen for the Halloween celebration they host for the needy of the inner city. Hymnals have been purchased and dedicated to loved ones by the membership, altar pieces have been restored, flowers have graced our liturgical services, food has been supplied to socials after every Mass and at special events and support has been given for renovation of the spaces we use. Our members generosity has also continued with endowments made to the group that help us to invest and, in turn, support many worthwhile projects in the gay/lesbian community which included a considerable contribution to the building fund for Affirmations and its community center building. We walk annually for AIDS and breast cancer and we serve at the Capuchin Soup kitchen and we continue to look for new ways to continue our giving spirit.

Dignity has also been a diverse community. Although the group worships in the traditional liturgy of the Roman Catholic faith we have seen diversity in our ranks. A former treasurer, then president, was Marvin Marks who was a Jewish man. Our council has had Episcopalians and Lutherans in its ranks. Canadians have also played an integral part in the growth of the organizations giving it an International flavor. We celebrate our diversity with gusto. As a consortium Dignity and Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays have formed panels of straight parents and gay children who put a human face on homosexuality and present this issue to various religious communities. We are male, female, transgender, old, young, coupled, single, straight, gay, Catholic and non, people of color, various ethnicities and levels of ability. We are the rainbow of God's creation and proud of it.

Justice and peace issues have also been a focus of our efforts in the years of our existence. Beginning in 1975 when 1,500 letters were sent to priests of the diocese to bring attention to Brian McNaught's hunger strike Dignity has gotten involved. Shortly after a prison ministry was begun. Over the years, members have been a presence at conferences affirming Gay/Lesbian Positive Identity, marches on the state capital, participants in a papal protest and lobbying in the halls of state government for equal rights. When Sr. Marilyn Bergt, CDP was elected to head a local AIDS organization, Wellness Networks, she was summarily chastised by the bishop and asked to cease and desist her

work or leave. Dignity members wrote in support. When Sr. Jeanine Gramick and Father Nugent were asked to cease their teaching on the issues of ministry to the gay/lesbian community Dignity/Detroit rose to the occasion and pledged support. Dignity/Detroit works for justice in the church through support to groups like Pax Christi and others who look to reform the church from within. We have supported the Human Rights Campaign fund, protest of the School of the Americas, AIDS outreach in South Africa joining with the ministry of the IHMs. Monthly we offer a rosary to the issues of peace and justice and include that plea in our prayers of the faithful.

Faith is the core of the being that is Dignity/Detroit. Fostered in an atmosphere of spirituality we work to strengthen those who seek to connect to their higher power. We have had our faith tried many times. After the death of Fr. Clement Kern we were left to wonder if the next administration would be as welcoming. For years we felt his spirit alive as Fr. Samonie and others felt that their community was stronger due to our presence as active members. When forced to move to a new home we were concerned that the dioceses recommendation that clergy not participate in our liturgy would end our weekly tradition. It is faith that has kept the clergy at our door and willing to celebrate with us. They come when called and assist with special holiday celebrations and baptisms. Through our Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), under the supervision of Sr. Mary Ann we have welcomed many into the Catholic church. Some of these persons have served on council and even as president. We have welcomed the children of Dignity that have been born or adopted into families within our ranks. We have initiated a memorial book to honor those who have gone before us and whose legacy lives on in our hearts. Retreats are held on a regular basis and soup and sermon events have been held to encourage growth in faith. Our liturgies have been called moving, exciting and inclusive by those who attend.

But, the greatest of these is love. Dignity is about caring for each other and those we share this planet with. We are about loving our church enough to challenge its thinking and remaining a living reminder that we are all God's children. We are about loving those who have shared their ministry with us and continue to do so knowing the true call of their vocation is to the whole church. We are about loving and giving witness to that love through our ministries.

The vision statement of the organization states: Spirituality, Equality and Justice nurtured in a welcoming Catholic Community.

**AND THAT IS DIGNITY DETROIT.....WAS DIGNITY DETROIT
AND..... WILL BE DIGNITY DETROIT**

DIGNITY CHAIRPERSONS/PRESIDENTS

| | |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| Founder | Brian McNaught |
| 1974-75 | Brian McNaught |
| 1975-76 | Michael Roche |
| 1976-77 | Bob Stanley |
| 1977-78 | Jay Ross - Marvin Marks |
| 1978-79 | Marvin Marks |
| 1979-80 | Jim Thompson |
| 1980-81 | Rick Baldwin |
| 1981-83 | Michael Gelaude |
| 1983-84 | Joe Lempicki |
| 1984-85 | Tom McGraw |
| 1985-92 | Frank D'Amore |
| 1992-94 | Dennis Dupre |
| 1994-96 | Jim Holubka |
| 1996-98 | Daniel Johnston |
| 1998-2004 | Ric Frievalt |
| 2004-06 | Frank D'Amore |
| 2006-08 | Mike Cardinal |
| 2008-12 | Frank D'Amore |
| 2012-14 | Glenn Crane |
| 2014-16 | Frank D'Amore |
| 2016-Present | Glenn Crane |

IMPORTANT DATES

May 11, 1974 Founded

May 15, 1974 First Meeting

May 19, 1974 First Mass Celebrated
(Pink Palace 2846 17th Street)

October 3, 1974 First Mass Celebrated
(Most Holy Trinity Church Sixth and Porter)

May 25, 1997 Last Mass Celebrated
(Most Holy Trinity Church Sixth and Porter)

June 1, 1997 First Mass Celebrated
(Sacred Heart Chapel Marygrove College Six Mile and Wyoming)

Today

THE FIRST DAY OF THE REST OF OUR LIFE