



Discussion Recording Form

Date__Feb. 18, 2018__

Chapter or Community_Dignity/Indianapolis_____

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”?

In the mid-1970's, Fr. Al Lankenau began leading small group gatherings of gay Catholics in Indianapolis. In the late 1970's, Dignity/Indianapolis formed and was later dissolved.

The present-day Dignity/Indianapolis traces its roots to a group of gay Catholics in Indianapolis who were members of St. Thomas Aquinas. They began meeting in 1980 as a parish ministry called St. Thomas Gay Catholic Support Group. This ministry formed after a period of years in which parishioners challenged the parish to include a support group for gay and lesbian Catholics. In August 1981, a group of gay Catholics met with Fr. Robert Nugent and Sr. Jeannine Gramick in Indianapolis for a retreat at the Alverna Retreat center. This included members of the St. Thomas group.

In 1981, they requested charter as a chapter of Dignity, Inc. under the name Dignity/Central Indiana. This was done with the support of St. Thomas Aquinas' pastor, Fr. Martin Peter. The charter was accepted in October 1981. Original members included John Goodwin, Mark Baker, James Malloy, Louis Dunn, David Rose, Rev. Brian McCall, Thomas Morris, Charles Wyeth, Greg Roebuck, and Edward Tremblay. Other early members included Robert Wilson, Kay Whitehead, and Charles Carroll, Jr. At some time in the 1980's, Dignity/Central Indiana became known as Dignity/Indianapolis. Members felt strongly that there was a need for connection with the institutional Church and a need for dialogue between gay Catholics and the institution. (This same view was not shared by the original Dignity/Indianapolis group.)

In the early days, there was no Mass celebrated for Dignity as the parish desired to include gay Catholics in its Sunday Masses. Chapter meetings were separate from Mass. Mass was only added later.

Dignity was formed in Indianapolis to provide support for gay Catholics as they strived to reconcile their faith and sexuality. Members in those days were generally out in the



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parish setting at St. Thomas but were mostly not out in their public lives.

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?

In the early days of our chapter, members were looking for a support structure because they were struggling with the intersection of faith and sexuality. Today, we find that less people “struggle” and have already reconciled these two parts of themselves when arriving at our chapter.

Indianapolis members began to feel strongly the need for a national voice following the “Halloween Letter” in 1986.

Compared to twenty years ago, many more parishes and priests in Indianapolis are welcoming to LGBTQI people. The younger generation of priests in our archdiocese does present a new challenge, as many of them are more conservative than their older counterparts.

We recognize the many ways in which the mission of DignityUSA has evolved over the years. We have seen less evolution locally. We continue to have a strong connection with St. Thomas Aquinas parish, although many of our members are not parishioners there today.



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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?

It was a risk to form our chapter and our organization over the opinions of society and church. In doing so, we have been true to ourselves.

In some ways, we feel that we have not always been “true to ourselves” in Indianapolis. There were times over the years in which we did not undertake certain activities (advertising in particular) that could have presented a risk to our continued meeting in Catholic space. To some degree, this remains a tension today.

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

Dignity remains a community for people to connect with one another. It has lessened the isolation felt by people. Dignity has helped many people reconcile their faith and sexuality in a positive manner.

Our chapter’s existence within St. Thomas Aquinas parish has caused the parish to grow in its awareness of LGBTQI people. It has required parishioners to work to reconcile faith and LGBTQI issues.