



## Discussion Recording Form

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Chapter or Community: DignityARIZONA, St Damian of Molokai Catholic Community

### SEGMENT TWO: TAKING STOCK TODAY

Facilitator / Recorder Worksheet

**1. How is the national movement called Dignity different today than it was in the 60's, 70's, 80's and 90's? How is your local expression different? How are YOU different?**

Person 1

– In LA in the mid 90s, the Catholic archdiocese attempted to usurp Dignity by starting a counter program called Comunidad. It was espoused to be a diocesan program for LGBT. Comunidad had glaring difference from Dignity because its foundation of abstinence – chaste relationships. They briefly flourished under Cardinal Mahoney. When he resigned, it withered as Cardinal Mahoney's successor had nothing to do with it. Comunidad had a strong community in Long Beach and Santa Monica. So, there was a brief presence to support LGBT during the AIDS epidemic. It was a pastoral presence during those times. It was the Roman Church in LA to move alongside Dignity.

– In the Phoenix diocese, Dignity met at St Agnes convent in the mid- 80's. Fr. Andre B presided. He received much unwanted publicity under Bishop Rausch who removed him from his position. Fr. Andre stayed as an associate on weekends with me. He also worked with the Malta Center and their grief group. Bishop O'Brien, Bishop Rausch's successor said, as long as there were no condoms on the property of the Malta Center, there was no problem.

– Also, the CASA put on a semi-annual retreat for people with HIV/AIDS. So "islands of experience" were able to occur in the diocese. We really didn't care about what was happening on the national level because the church was local. Now, the local experience is punitive.

– In late 70-early 80s, one could celebrate as a diocesan priest for Dignity. In 1992, a real backlash against the petition No More Silent occurred. Those [RC priests] who did not remove their names from the document were removed from their assignments. Currently, the people in RC authority in Phoenix have no tolerance or acceptance to even consider engagement with Dignity. So, yes, National has grown, but the local communities have shrunk and become somewhat underground

– Also, straight people are not going to church either. There's a bigger issue. Maybe if we could think about redefining a church, a community and find out the elements to be active, maybe people would want to be a part of it.

Almost like "reinventing the plan while you are flying it from the inside." It really



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doesn't matter what it will look like. This gives us a wide range of possibilities. You are right, there are generational differences – we are looking at people who have experienced a whole range of history. The question then is how does a community look and respond to the variety of people and who makes the community?

– The change in me is I lost my shame. That was a big issue when I came into acceptance of my homosexuality. That internalized homophobia was hard to shake. At this point in my life, I'm a lot less ashamed and more free. I can say I'm gay more directly without getting heart flutters. That's the new place I'm at now.

### Person 2

– Seems like Dignity national kind of was like what individual groups were like at one point – stay under the bishops' radar than poking the bear.

– I'm 36 – people younger than me know that you can be LGBT and Christian without a problem. Makes a question – if you can be both, why aren't people going to church?

– I've been with dignity 10 years – I'm no longer in my 20s. I still consider myself RC. When I moved to AZ after college, I went to church. But was seeking something else. I found Dignity. Now, wherever I go, I know I can find a RC similar to the CASA or St. Mary's and a Dignity chapter. That way, I know I'm not alone. I can be myself and know that I have a good religious home. I have that security. I'm not wanting to be an island on my own.

### Person 3

– Marianne Duddy-Burke has done this [Dignity USA] in collaboration with other progressive Catholic reform groups: Fortunate Families, Call to Action – there is a much more collaborative effort due to her leadership. She was the representation for Dignity at the WH when Obama was president.

Now Dignity has gotten involved with an international LGBT group. They have been at international conferences. The reach has grown and still deals with issues in the RC – much more collaboratively and internationally.

– It's hard for me to have a sense of 60s – 90s because I really did not start with Dignity until late 90s to 2000. Dignity had not been on my radar.

– In the early part of Dignity's life. the 60s – 80s, there was more of an openness by the RC hierarchy to support Dignity, e.g. could use RC property. Even if there was uneasiness, there was at least a dialogue. This happened until mid 80's.

– The tone changed between the LGBT community and the RC. At one point, [the tone] was a bit friendly, a dialogue to stay connected despite the differences. Now, there's a disconnect – particularly from the hierarchy which does not want anything to do with LGBT community unless the community embraces the church's teachings. No dialogue now.

– For a brief period of time, the Phoenix chapter was meeting at the Kino Center.

– this is the second question – we don't seem to have the connection any longer now. It was richer, more connected.



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– The trend is away from organized religion. People finding it increasingly more difficult to contend with some of the basic beliefs.

– I grew up RC and Byzantine Catholic. Initially when I left the church, I was angry – stayed outside for 25 years. When I came back, though I chose another path, I had to reconcile. Two things helped me: My involvement with Dignity helped me heal the wound. Now, I have scarring, but no woundedness. The other thing that helped me was volunteering at the Malta Center. The parent church reaching out helped me even though limited to those who were dying. Thought I don't have an official proclamation that I belong to the RC, I belong here, the Episcopal church, the Lutheran church, anywhere I am.

### Person 4

– I don't go back with it to 60s – 90s. Got involved in the 2000s in Hawaii.

– In Honolulu, the second enforcer Bishop held tight to the policy of the church's stance on LGBT affairs. Gay priest beach section in HI ended when they sent the first enforcer Bishop.

– Things have now become more rigid. The time period early in the AIDS time, the church liked caring for their gay dying members.

– Maybe this is due to the Church, but also now, people are not as religious. There has been a move away, not only among LGBT, but among many people to move way from organized religions. Why would you stay with something where you are not loved? God loves you regardless of you being at a church or not.

– Some have explored other spiritual paths, gone to the Episcopal church.

– The national gatherings – I see the number of younger people and I wonder if these people are more from the East Coast. Even more women seem to be there – again, from the East Coast?? Sociological factors are a part of this.

– As opposed to when I first came out, I now don't give a damn what a bishop, priest thinks. I don't care what you think about me – you have nothing to do with my spirituality. I don't worry about that any longer. You are not going to tell me things to scare me. When I was younger, I was just amazed to see anything affirming about LGBT. I grew up in a Black Catholic Church, we had other immediate concerns. Today, I don't have any concern about a priest telling me things.

– I am much more aware of my need for spirituality and my connection with others. Before, I saw that more abstract way. Now, I see the need in my daily life.

### Person 5

– My first acquaintance with Dignity is that there were Catholic roots. When I first arrived in Phoenix, Dignity was alive. There was a sense of being with the Church, but outlaws – Brother John, Friar Tuck. Priests celebrated Mass, but there was no connection with Bishop O'Brien. There were two dinners for priests and priests were celebrated for supporting Dignity. When Bishop Olmstead came, the first four letters he sent were about homosexuality. He clamped down on those who signed No Longer Silent and priests could no longer celebrate for Dignity in Phoenix.



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- Dignity now seems to have dried up.
- Since the presidency of Burke – Dignity became a national force to the RC – a national spokesperson to the RC in the USA, but not that before. I attended a couple of national conventions because they were where I was located. They were noisy, but nothing happened afterwards. But since Burke, she began to speak to the Counsel of bishops and established Dignity as a national voice
- In the 60 – 70, Dignity was a much more local effort. The national convention was for local groups to come together and speak. The national did not have much teeth. Now, Dignity national has a big bite.



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### 2. Considering the passion and conviction that fueled our growth, how well is our “engine” running, in terms of inspiring passion, involvement, change, etc. – in service to our mission today?

#### Person 1

- The work of Dignity to include marginalized groups in the RC exacerbates the already existing tension between the already hierarchy of the Church and Dignity. The elephant in the room has become even bigger.
- Dignity itself is divided. There is such as thing as homogeneity. In the USA, we are not the homogeneous group we think we are.
- “The engine is idling so quietly, we don’t think the engine is running at all.”
- What percentage of people who were active when you came in 1993 are still alive?
- All this occurred before social media as well. I wonder what it would look like as it is today in the midst of defining and creating a vital engine to bring together LGBT Catholics
- Phoenix is 10 suburbs trying to be a community – very different from SF. Maybe developing regional communities that can come together. Michael and Sean have their community in Tempe. Maybe that’s something to look at.

#### Person 2

- I thought of the analogy of the elephant in a dark room – some feel the trunk, the tail, etc. I’ve always thought that in Dignity we believe in gay marriage, female priests, but then thought about the divisions. How do we get more people involved?

#### Person 3

- Burke is the spokesperson. I always sensed the collaborative relationship between the local chapters and the National Board of Directors. Chris Pett is now the Board Chair and is nationally known.
- There are opportunities for improvement – for the National, much better, clearer communication and clarity about where they are going. Maybe that’s why these conversations at the local level are happening.
- You’ll see women presiders. Dignity has taken on the issue of women’s ordination. Also taking on priests from other Catholic jurisdictions. These are issues other than LGBT. So, what is Dignity national’s primary focus?
- The meta issue for Dignity is inclusivity. I wonder if the National group has spoken openly for this.
- There were at one point regional communities before I was participating. Maybe that’s something to think about.
- Another element, in the 60- 80’s there was more activism. Yes, recently we’re reclaiming our energy, but that lack of activism doesn’t fuel the engine so much.



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### Person 4

- There a number of people very involved at least at the conventions.
- I had a sense about 4 – 5 years ago from National communications that the National was going to become less LGBT focused and I had a negative reaction. When I felt it was going to be diffuse, it bothered me a little bit. However, I've not had that sense in recent years.
- I was warned that I'd hear heated discussion about accepting anything other than LGBT being included. There are those tensions still.
- A lot of those people now go to the CASA just like those in SF go to Holy Redeemer. Where our passion is, our energy goes there. Do we see Dignity as a great thing to share, as central to our lives, and part of our social identity? Where that passion is, is comfort level.
- Dignity SF has many more postings on social media and is likely more liberal along the lines I'm comfortable with.
- Different communities have different personalities. I'm more comfortable in SF and HI than Phoenix. Media has made people a bit more isolated.

### Person 5

- That [engine running] is one of the elephants in the room. My experience with friends in other chapters and with chapters – when women preside, members stay away. There's an antipathy towards women. Dignity locally was predominately men. When locally women ascended to leadership in Dignity AZ, a number of men stepped away.
- When I came to the chapter in 1993, the membership was much younger. People were interested in socializing as well as liturgy. We had young professionals recently out of college, finding their way in the world of living in Phoenix. We are older, we've gotten older. We have social relationships outside of Dignity and don't need it to have other relationships. It's not just liturgical – it's the whole fabric. It would be good to know the median age from a national level.



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### 3. Is the mission and purpose of Dignity still relevant today? If not, why not? If it is, what key challenges and opportunities do you see ahead?

Person 1

– I think the church for many of us has a role for being accepted and to be rejected by the church is hurtful. We can be a voice that is welcoming to some degree for people who are somewhere on their journey. As long as the church has a visible manifestation locally of being shameful, punitive, condemning, rejecting of LGBTQ, then in “justice,” we offer welcome. We may be on the fringe ourselves, but we can bring people into the fold and provide shelter. People are still killing themselves, using drugs/alcohol because of the rejection. Dignity is very important. Only now are some states outlawing reparative therapy.

– Robert Frost – home is a place that when you show up they have to take you in.

Person 2

– Yes, it’s relevant because the RC is not going anywhere. There’s always going to be LGBTQ versus the RC.

– It’s not as relevant because gay marriage is legal – I don’t need to fight any longer and can get married.

Person 3

– The reach [of Dignity USA] is becoming more international.

– Organizations can have similar development to humans. I wonder if Dignity is at the point of individuation from the parent Church. The evolution from the symbiotic state to individuation. Is Dignity becoming an alternative Catholic experience to the RC? What does Dignity want to be when it grows up? I agree that given the traditional stance of the RC, there will always be a need for a component of the church to be that safe place for folks.

Person 4

– I see it still relevant – a study shows that LGBTQ people are more likely to die by suicide if they are religious. I think it’s relevant because there are more churches are now inclusive. Many of the pastors who were pastoring MCC, are now pastoring in main denominations that are more affirming, inclusive.

– I think for people who Catholic and are not accepted by the church – they don’t have to through away that part of who they are. Dignity still has a role in that. The question we need to ask ourselves, is, “Are we up to it? In the liturgy, preaching, etc, are we going to be able to offer it?”

– The idea of community – being real, authentic, and there for people is important. Being there for one another really is an important component of community.



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### 4. With the benefit of hindsight, how has Dignity changed lives for the better, locally and nationally? Changed the Catholic community? Impacted the LGBTQ social justice movement?

#### Person 1

- I've been a witness to the community that is seeking and searching for acceptance, support, and solace. It [Dignity] is a witness to local groups via financial support. It is a witness to the hierarchy – we are queer, we're here, get over it.
- The fact that "Dignity" is the name means that the organization stands rooted on that value.
- It's the history of the beast – it [Dignity] was an idea that spread. Locally, it caught fire and every community responded as it would. There was no need for the national. As things settled out historically and history changed the make-up of the hierarchy of the church, the movement from local to national changed. It was a process of evolution.
- I think politically, the elected officials in Washington, ought to reflect the wishes of the people locally. If there's a disconnect, the question gets raised, what's Washington doing?
- When you plant a tree, you may not see the leaves, growth for some time, but you still plant the tree. You nourish it, water it for subsequent generations.

#### Person 2

- In the beginning decades, it seems like the local were louder than the national and now, it seems the national is louder than local. The question is how? Is this okay that national is louder than the local?

#### Person 3

- [Dignity has made] lives for the better. It has helped LGBTQ people resolve tension, negotiate intrapsychic pain as a result of the teachings they've been exposed to, given value, a place to call home – helped them reconcile their lives and faith. On a larger scale, Dignity has helped the general Catholic populous learn that LGBTQ persons are not disordered, etc. and helped create some acceptance.
- The organization has been a prophetic voice and speaks truth to power related to LGBTQ issues. Now, not sure if Dignity wants to speak truth to power re: women, other marginalized groups.
- I would like to know Dignity national's approach to speaking truth to power now? Are they taking a more conciliatory approach or a more assertive, confrontational voice in speaking truth to power? They need to let us know . . . This seems like an elliptical process.
- Maybe the next step = if Dignity national needs to be more involved with the local level. I'm not saying there's incongruence, but there seems to be a lack of clarity.
- I'm disappointed that more people locally did not join in this [Jubilee Discussion]



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process.

– The groundswell will come from the laity and eventually, the hierarchy will listen. e.g. Francis is asking for input about married priests. The RC changes slowly. Until such time as it does change, it needs to be reminded of its people.

Person 4

– I'm thinking of John McNeal. Dignity has given people a place to share their gifts with others when they could not within the RC. It gave a home space from which some people could work, disseminate, and send out their ways into the world.

– The structure of the Catholic church in the USA will not change. Even though Dignity has made changes in how people see us, maybe we are hitting our heads against the wall.

Person 5

– Dignity is a voice within the church and speaks to the church hierarchy and laity about the meaning of community for those who are thought to be different.

– Speaking of Dignity National and local chapters, speaks to a division. Dignity national should grow out of the local level. Dignity national is a force, but Dignity local is struggling or in some cases, disappearing.

– This [Jubilee Discussion] process is a step of healing of that breach.