



Discussion Recording Form

Date: June 11, 2018

Chapter or Community: Dignity Boston, founded 1972.

SEGMENT TWO: TAKING STOCK TODAY

Facilitator / Recorder Worksheet

Context: Marshall Goldsmith authored a book called What Got You Here Won't Get You There. Change is constant and usually not easy. The world around us has changed significantly since the early years of DignityUSA. The purpose of this discussion is to reflect on the nature of the changes we are experiencing (“Here”), and the opportunities and challenges they pose for us as we consider the future needs we are called to meet. (“There”).

1. How is the world different today than our starting point? What has changed over time – within the Church, society, community...? What opportunities do these present?

For this question, we chose to create a “visual timeline.” Members were invited to write down significant events that occurred in the life of our chapter on a series of posters, one for each decade, beginning in the 1960s and extending through 2018. We felt that this activity would help connect/integrate the first part of the Jubilee conversation that occurred in January with the evening’s discussion of the present. Participants included some personal events (e.g. commitment ceremonies). Selected shared community events and influential world events that were recorded are listed below.

- 1969: Stonewall Riots
- 1972: Dignity/Boston founded.
- 1974: Dignity/Boston in NYC Pride March
- 1976: First Lay Eucharistic Minister
- 1981: First HIV diagnosis in Boston
- 1981: First Liturgy in Celebration of Women; concelebrated by Episcopal woman priest and Dignity/Boston priest
- 1980’s: HIV/AIDS Crisis
- 1985: Office fire/arson
- 1986: “Halloween” letter from the Vatican
- 1987: Miami Convention. Explicit statement of support for same-sex relationships.
- 1992: Schism – Some men leaving Dignity/Boston.
- 1992: Vatican letter opposing civil rights

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- 1993: March on Washington. Dignity/Boston folks go on a bus.
- 1993: Marianne Duddy-Burke 1st president of DignityUSA.
- 1994: Stonewall 25
- 1995: LA Conference
- 1997: Prophets to the World, Boston Conference. Every convention goer given a stole – priesthood of all believers.
- 1998: Eucharistic Prayer around the altar begins.
- 2000: Civil Union passes in VT.
- 2001: Priest sex abuse scandal breaks.
- 2003: November 18th, MA State Supreme Judicial Court rules for same sex marriage.
- 2003: U.S. Supreme Court rules antisodomy laws unconstitutional
- 2004: God, Gays, and Guns.
- 2010's: MA Protection of Trans/Jobs/Housing/Credit/Education/Hate Crime Law.
- 2015: Dignity/Boston worship space moved to St. Stephen's.
- 2015: Equal Marriage SCOTUS.

We then discussed the opportunities presented by the events that had been recalled and written on the timelines. The following topics were discussed:

- In general, there has been diminished ecclesial authority and greater awareness/support of LGBTQI people over time.
- At the time of the Stonewall Riots, one of our members was 25 years old and he remarked that this gave him the courage to “come out” at his place of work.
- MARRIAGE:
 - Locally, there were opportunities to become active around protecting marriage equality in MA. Dignity/Boston members participated in advocacy in many forms including at the State House, events, rallies, phone banking, and writing letters. “We became activists, speaking from the experience of our faith.”
 - The marriages of several couples that occurred early after the legalization of gay marriage in MA influenced other couples to follow suit and to have their own marriage ceremonies.
- LITURGY:
 - One member remarked that when she began attending Dignity/Boston regularly in 1998, “once per month there was Eucharist around the altar, and then it became every Sunday shortly after.” “It made me feel like part of the process, rather than an ‘onlooker.’”
 - Moving our place of worship to our current space (St. Stephen's) has had a positive influence on our community because we have built relationships with different faith communities, particularly with the Episcopal church community that worships there. Their children's and

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after-school ministries are inspiring and we are proud to be connected to them.

- **WOMEN'S ROLES:**
 - In 1993, Marianne Duddy-Burke became the first president of DignityUSA. Before that point, women were on the board, but had not taken these higher leadership positions. Since then, we have had many female leaders. With Marianne's leadership in 1993 and onward, women felt empowered to take on these leadership roles.
 - Regarding women taking on liturgical roles:
 - Began with "home liturgies" where women would preside. This followed directly after a local Episcopal church started to ordain women. Some Dignity/Boston members at the time did not feel comfortable having women take on presiding roles, so home liturgies offered an opportunity to include women.
 - In the early 1980s, "the first liturgy in celebration of women" happened. It was co-presided by an Episcopal woman priest and male Dignity/Boston priest.
 - "We sang songs appropriate with language that had been changed. It was pretty controversial. But we never looked back. Every step after that was about changing all the language to make it inclusive and have a liturgy every year to make it inclusive. It was like the first few steps and then the world didn't end."
 - Another male member shared that around 1991-92, there was another "women's liturgy." "Then there were more lay led liturgies with women co-presiding. That made a difference for me in coming to a church where women were equally included."
- Members discussed the HIV/AIDS crisis. Selected quotes:
 - "HIV/AIDS absolutely changed the face of the community forever. Who we lost, who did not survive to today. It certainly changed us. We created a million things in response. Organizations, political efforts, activism, institutions, and ways we remember people in the Book of Remembrance." There were a lot of people that we lost."
 - "I remember when we were going to funerals once a month. It was a sad time."

2. What has changed within your community?

This question was discussed in small groups. It was posed in combination with Question 3. Responses are described below:

- Our chapter was described as "nomadic," as we have moved between several worship spaces over time. There was agreement that moving to the current space was beneficial to us as a community.
 - "This space fits us better, it's more intimate, we are closer to the altar, we can hear each other better."

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- This has been a “chance to partner with a vibrant community.”
- “Here there are signs, posters...there is life. It injects a sense of mission and direction into our own community.”
- It is a “smaller but friendlier space...might be challenging too for weddings and memorials”
- Accessibility of this worship space is valued. Unlike the previous space, this church does not have a staircase to enter. However, more needs to be done in terms of accessibility for people of all hearing abilities. A sound system is being considered.
- “We are liturgically more progressive than we were. We are further away from the institutional liturgy.” We use different language.
- Lay led liturgies and woman presiders are now the norm:
 - When these changes were made, “We lost a lot of people, with what now do not feel much, but with lay led liturgies, women presiding. People were shouting, throwing things, calling names.”
 - A nearby Jesuit Urban Center drew some of the people who were uncomfortable with the changes happening at Dignity with women and lay roles.
 - Our celebration of Mary of Magdala, one liturgy a year with a solo woman celebrant, has made some uncomfortable and they have chosen to not attend this liturgy.
- Ordained and Lay Presiders:
 - “Priests on sabbatical would come. Then they were told not to, and that peeled off.” Two male, ordained presiders presided at Dignity/Boston for a long time.
 - “Now we have a monthly lay led liturgy. I don’t know whether we would have done that, if we had not. We did not want to burn out [the ordained presiders].”
 - “We had done a lot as a community to accept the role of lay presiders. We got stronger because of that.”
- The sex abuse scandal resulted in fewer people calling themselves Catholic, as a result, we were connected to allies.
- In the 2000’s, we had a number of members who identified as transgender. At another point, there was a “strong cohort of college students.” Today, we do not have a large group of members of either of these.
- One member’s advocacy in the trans* community has helped us see things through a different filter “intellectually and emotionally.”
- Our chapter has become more financially stable and remained so.
- There was concern among many about how our community’s numbers have diminished and how members are aging.
 - Related concerns include fewer people attending liturgy regularly, having a smaller music ministry, fewer people running for the Executive

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Board. Some of this was attributed to there being “more options” in terms of places of worship that are welcoming to LGBTQI individuals.

- One member stated “We could die out as a community if this persists.”
- There is more acceptance among our families and friends. (e.g. Heterosexual Catholics for Gay Marriage).
- There is greater advocacy and public service which has contributed to visibility.
- We no longer rent office space, which has decreased liturgy related community activities.
- “We are getting more into Social Media.” “We need to do more. We are not speaking the language of the newcomers.”
- There has been an “increase in acceptance of the non-queer community.”
- External engagement in Social Justice causes has increased our “vitality.”
- We have demonstrated flexibility in our willingness to make changes to the Executive Board’s structure over time.
- We have a strong link to DignityUSA because of Marianne and other local members who have taken on board positions.
- “We have gone from seeking an inclusive community, to a desire to be included in the Catholic church, to creating our own Catholic church.”
- Our community wonders how we serve the LGBTQI community, and address the challenges of this Catholic community – in a world where we have more welcoming LGBTQI communities of worship, including some within our own city.

3. How are these changes affecting your ability to thrive? How have you adapted?

- *Please see the responses above for combined Questions 2 & 3.*
- *Some written responses, submitted by attendees who “scribed” the small group conversations are included below:*
 - In the 1990’s, we had spirituality groups and retreats. There was a couple’s ministry. These groups either modified or dissolved over time.
 - We send lots of leadership and talent to DignityUSA. This helps create a connection to the larger group and work in the larger context including local, national, and international levels.

4. Is the mission and purpose of Dignity still relevant today? Why or why not?

For this question, participants were provided with a copy of DignityUSA’s Position and Purpose statement for reference.

- “Yes – we have not achieved full inclusion and equality. Our rights are being threatened by ‘religious liberty’ and the action of the Bishops colluding with Trump-Pence. How do we raise awareness?”
- Re: Youth
 - “But a lot of young people don’t want to go to church.” There are exceptions among the very religious. “Are the reasons well understood?”

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- “We need to express mission/work in ways younger people identify with.”
- A common discussion point was about how we interface with the Institutional Church. Thoughts included:
 - The statement is timely because we are no longer negotiating with the institutional church.
 - One member pondered: “How do you change the institutional church? Even though we are not part of it,” we are “actually outside of it.”
 - “One of our members here, when he read the mission statement, the main thing that came up to him is that our mission is very combative, meaning it’s against the church, instead of leading someone to love God. Of course there is spiritual development here. We are not accepted by the church so it is still relevant today.”
 - “For me, to be accepted to God, we do not have to be accepted by the Catholic church.”
- Some groups discussed the possible inclusion of allies and others who share progressive/inclusive values.
 - “What makes Dignity/Boston different from other inclusive Catholic churches or intentional communities?”
 - “Progressive and inclusive” is not included in the Statement of Position and Purpose.
 - One member stated that although the mission and purpose is relevant, it needs “to be updated to be more inclusive to everyone, not just LGBTQ people.”
 - Another member reflected: “How do we grow to make us stay relevant? When people do have those other opportunities [other Christian communities that welcome LGBTQI people], what makes them want to stay here? I love it here, and even though I’m not Catholic. I have an opportunity to go to UCC...It’s the community that keeps me here. I feel more welcomed, needed, and included. As opposed to others where only a few people would know your name.”
- In response to whether the mission and purpose is still relevant today, one member remarked: “Yes, but in a more diverse world, we need to find the ways of opening our doors to a population that might see church differently from ours. How do we work to serve the LGTQIA community in a world with more open and inviting faith communities?”

5. What are you learning as you grapple with these challenges? What wisdom and insight can you bring to the whole of Dignity about the future?

- If we consider a “Life, death, resurrection” model: “Where is our journey leading, and what are we transforming into?”
- “Practice acceptance and let go.”

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- “To be accepted by God, we don’t have to be accepted by the Roman Catholic Church.”
- Re: promoting reform in the Institutional Church: “How does that get brought to the larger church as the larger church has been very exclusive? How do you change the institutional church when outside of it?” (oppression by the church is occurring).
- “We need to think about the future in smaller increments, rather than 10-20 years. Where will Dignity be in 2-3 years? What will it look like? How do we get new blood into the organization?”
- “Today’s youth will sign up for short term, rather than long term investments.”
- We are “[grappling] with the reality of more open and welcoming communities. I see more and interesting ways of being a faith community. I find myself meditating on avoiding resistance.”
- There is sometimes tension felt between a primary mission of creating a LGBTQI community that welcomes others, and a “progressive inclusive Catholic community” that includes LGBTQI Catholics as much as it does others who share progressive and inclusive values. A question to consider is “Might we be more expansive if we were less up front about being an LGBTQI organization?”
- One of our challenges is that we are a smaller community than we once were. In response, one of our strengths is that we have invited members to take on many roles. “If you find people who have the energy to share their gifts, find opportunities and invite them into the work. We have learned to do this to survive. Really tap the talents and energy of the community. Almost everyone in the community has a job.”
- One member voiced having had a revelation about our strengths as a community as they considered the past and present of the chapter: “What are we taking for granted in our daily expression of our faith?” For example, the ‘Kiss of Peace’, in which the congregation hugs and kisses others. “Go to most any other church, you are not going to have this experience.”



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SESSION FEEDBACK FORM

(To be completed following each Segment discussions)

- 1) Approximately what percentage of your community participated? ____ How productive was this conversation for your community? **As a facilitator, what worked well and why?**

Segment Two: As with our first session, approximately 80-90% of our regular attendees joined us for this evening of conversation. The discussion was rich and it was evident that our community is invested in both reflection and in discovering our future path as a chapter within our larger DignityUSA community.

Having small group discussions created opportunities for each individual to share their experiences and insights. It facilitated an equal the playing field where long-time and newer members could all feel that their contributions were valued. It also helped to have one person from each group to “scribe” responses, in addition to one person who was designated to take notes for the larger group.

We continue to feel that we could spend more than one evening on these questions. However, we opted to have only one evening of conversation knowing how busy our calendar is at this time of year as a community with events such as Pride.

- 2) **What would you do differently next time? Consider both preparation, the actual conversation and follow-up.**

We find that “hands-on” activities work well to break the ice and involve everyone in the discussion. This also benefits those with different learning and processing styles. We are continuing to explore how we will share the information/data gathered with the community at the conclusion of the three sessions.



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3) What are your suggestions for improving the supporting materials, process, and the discussion they were meant to encourage?

he questions provided were definitely conducive to rich discussion! We found it helpful to combine some of the questions this time to help keep the conversation to 1.5 hours total. This also seemed to be a good fit because the questions were related and flowed seamlessly into the next.