Report: Dignity/Chicago 2nd Jubilee Consultation – Taking Stock Today

Overall Findings:
• DignityUSA’s mission is still relevant today, but the needs have changed, and the way to deliver on that mission needs to change.
• Our chapter has not yet adapted to the current needs of the community, relying and focusing too much on weekly liturgy – We need a new model
• Trans community is currently being underserved – how do we reorient our efforts to better address their needs
• Desire to build more time and energy for outreach efforts and avoid becoming too insular

Current Context:
• Attendance has declined significantly over the years – currently get 15-20 people on Sundays
• New people come, but few come back or engage regularly
• Seeing fewer people who come from religious communities or who have been educated in catholic school system
• Overall church attendance down, even at parishes and AGLO
• Younger generations less interested in weekly liturgy
• Those who do attend church typically prefer to be with their local community, with parishes now welcoming couples and children
• Continued competition from welcoming parishes and AGLO
• Disconnect between Pope Francis’s friendlier message and the stance of US Bishops, including many in Illinois.

Mission:
• Members feel there is still a need for Dignity’s mission, particularly when it comes to education, advocacy, and support
• Several members noticed that the word “liturgy” is not part of the mission, and yet it consumes 90% of our time and effort
• Over the years, liturgy has been, and continues to be, a flashpoint for conflict that drives members away
• Despite shrinking numbers, the mission is still relevant because:
  o Not all parishes are willing to administer the sacraments to LGBTQIA – we had a recent adult baptism
  o US Bishops all over the place when it comes to inclusivity
  o There is still need for affirming, LGBTQIA-positive theology and education to counter outdated church teaching
  o The church needs an independent and visible organization to hold it accountable and push it in a more progressive direction, especially when it comes to LGBTQIA social justice issues

What is different from other DignityUSA chapters:
• Women Presiders
• One of the few chapter still offering weekly liturgy
• Coexist with AGLO and welcoming parishes, and located in a relatively liberal archdiocese
• Not afraid to try new programs, but could be more entrepreneurial
• Opportunity for more outreach to external groups

Our Impact:
• The very existence of AGLO and welcoming parishes is in response to Dignity
• Community a reliable source of support for many people, even people who do not regularly attend liturgy
• We are often the only public and visible, LGBTQIA catholic presence in the community
• We provide confidence to people struggling with catholic theology and what it means in their life
• We provide a responsible sexual ethic for those looking to reconcile catholicism with their sexuality
• Role model of inclusivity
• We empower young Catholics, but we could do more

Things we need to change
• More outreach to empower younger Catholics
• Support trans community – tackle poverty and violence
• Raise visibility for our mission and message
• Consider more partnerships with other groups
• Take Dignity “on the road”
• Make our education more accessible
• Make education on the intersection of Catholic & LGBTQIA our key differentiator vs social service agencies
• None of this will be possible unless we build some capacity – test reducing the frequency of liturgies or the way it is delivered
• We need a financial model that is less reliable on weekly liturgy contributions