

“TAKING STOCK TODAY” DISCUSSION NOTES

Date of Discussion: June 10, 2018

Chapter/Community/Caucus: The Living Beatitudes Community (Dignity/Dayton)

SEGMENT TWO: TAKING STOCK TODAY

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

There have been a number of changes over the decades since our community has been in existence. We have experienced shifts in religious philosophy, in a more diverse community and in a more socially active community.

In the past, our community was predominantly male and gay. Now there are as many female members as male members; we have two female presiders. We also have more straight members. These changes have led to a change in perspective. Rather than seeing things solely from a gay male perspective, we now use a woman’s perspective as well as well as a straight perspective. It has broadened our horizons.

Our theology is also different. We went from a Catholic redemptive theology to a more incarnational theology, a more Progressive Christianity. Some of our presiders are married priests. We’ve moved from worshipping together only twice a month to offering a liturgy every Sunday.

Our community is more active. Members have stepped up and are willing to lead. We have contested elections for our board. More members are involved as readers and co-presiders. Community involvement doesn’t just begin and end on Sundays. We have an active Social Justice committee. Our participation in educational programs is high, such as one on White Privilege, offered along with another church.

We have refocused away from ourselves, expanding into other areas of injustice. We have integrated other spiritual beliefs and practices. There is an awareness of what we stand for in the Dayton church community.

We have also realized the value of being connected to national organizations like DignityUSA and FCM (Federation of Christian Ministries) that speak to the justice and dignity of all people and are heard on the national level.

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?

Our engine is running well and there a number of signs that point to this fact.

We have a mixture of loving people; we have married people and partners who are an example to the whole community of how relationships can happen. We draw from each other in the community a love that is rare. We have high participation; members attend events and help each other. Our numbers have grown. Friendships have grown out of the weekly lunch we offer after the liturgy.

We commend the men who started this community and were willing to change as the community evolved. We learned that we are bigger than one issue. Several years ago the community completed an eighteen- month study on the Beatitudes. It led to the community’s change of name and to the establishment of an active Social Justice Committee. We use the Beatitudes as a touchstone and will be reconnecting with that touchstone during Advent this year.

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?

Prior to answering this question, we reviewed the mission statement as a community and we concluded that the mission and purpose of Dignity are absolutely relevant today.

We do face a number of challenges. We worship in a small space in a struggling downtown. Our community is ageing and we are not very diverse. We are an older, predominantly white community and have not had success attracting younger or minority members. Many young families attend mega churches because of what they can offer. Also, an older congregation uses social media differently than a younger one.

The Catholic Church is itself a problem, as is the Pope. He says God made you this way, but if you are a woman or a gay man you cannot become a priest. Many Protestant churches have moved on and have welcomed women and LBGTQ members into the ministry.

We know that we must keep evolving. Despite our many challenges, our community keeps moving forward. We are not afraid to take on new ones.

With the benefit of hindsight, how has Dignity changed lives for the better locally and nationally? How has it changed the Catholic community? How has it impacted the LGBTQ social justice movement?

We've learned that church is not the building, but the people. That is an incredible freedom because the main focus is not on maintaining the building.

We are different than national Dignity because we are not focused solely on Catholicism. We do worship in the Catholic tradition, but are more ecumenical. It may be that focus has led us to evolve spiritually as a community because have been less wedded to doctrine.

Ironically, our community happened because gay groups were not accepted in Catholic churches. Many members of the community felt that the size and focus of the community have led us to be a special place. We have built a City of God where those on the fringes have been welcomed into the community. Straight people in the community have been willing to stand up and speak up on LGBTQ issues. As one of our members noted, she does not see others as gay or straight but "I see it as whom I love." The community has grown in both, gay and straight directions, fostering understanding and acceptance and really living the Word of God. Jesus met with the disciples in an intimate setting. We are able to speak our hearts and to share stories with one another in the kind of setting not offered in the mega churches. Because we are small, we're able to have relationships with each other. We feel very blessed and grateful.

The members of our community feel their involvement with our community has changed their lives for the better.