

Jubilee Discussions - Discussion Recording Form - 2

Submitted by: [Jeff Stone, chapter secretary](#) Date: [August 2, 2018 \(from notes taken June 10, 2018, when session was held\)](#)

Chapter /Community/Caucus [Dignity/New York](#)

SEGMENT TWO: TAKING STOCK Facilitator / Recorder Worksheet

1. How is DignityUSA different today than it was in the past? How are your local chapter and community different? How are YOU different?

[We are one-tenth the size we were at our height. We are not the powerhouse we were 30 years ago. Our numbers are decreasing and there are many factors. Catholic schools and seminaries are much smaller than they used to be. Fewer people identify as Catholic and they don't feel they need the approval of the Church.](#)

[When I joined in 1978 Dignity was really the only game in town. Back then there were not many options for socializing other than the bars.](#)

[When I joined in 2010 there was only one other member in his 20s. Now there are a lot more people in their 20s and early 30s. These people will be the future of our chapter.](#)

[My involvement with the chapter goes back to the 1980s, with interruptions. Two things have happened. My generation was the last generation that was truly churched. Church was something that almost everyone did. America is much less churched now. Also there are many accepting parishes with LGBTQI ministries, like St. Paul the Apostle and St. Francis Xavier here in Manhattan.](#)

[Where is the passion? I don't feel it now the way I did 30 years ago.](#)

[Many people are not interested in the Catholic Church at all. The Church has "damaged its brand" in ways that go far beyond Dignity and the LGBTQI community.](#)

[We have talked in the past about doing organized outreach to the large Latino Catholic LGBTQI community in NYC, but that didn't happen. "You abandoned this population."](#)

[In response: that is a very large task that we may not have the resources for. It means going out into other parts of the city and offering liturgies and services there. We are at our limit doing our weekly Sunday night liturgies and our monthly Come to the Table liturgy. We do have a significant number of Latino members.](#)

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

We have greatly changed our liturgies in recent years with the use of lay presiders, including women. We are serving as a prophetic community for the broader church.

Other local Dignity communities have been expanding their tent, looking for people who are alienated from the traditional Church, who are not necessarily LGBTQI. Divorced people, women. We could do that more.

It is hard to reproduce that Dayton model in other places. A lot of it depends on local circumstances and options. We are in a much larger city that tends to separate into niche communities.

Brendan Fay recently showed his John McNeill film in Washington, DC. Some members of the chapter there who attended had never heard of it. We need to do re-education from time to time.

We need to tell our stories over and over but to new people. We are too lazy and too comfortable. We talk to the same people over and over.

I agree that we need to tell our story more often and more effectively. We need to do Gay Catholic 101.

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?

Our main challenge is to be out there, to let people know about us. We need to be as explicit as possible about who we are and what we're about.

We've never been more “cafeteria Catholics” than we are now. The Church is in turmoil on LGBTQI issues.

A question: how interrelated are the various chapters around the country? Are chapters isolated islands or an integrated network?

Why are we not more pumped up and outraged at what is happening politically to LGBTQI people and others right now? How much more blatant can the LGBTQI agenda of the Trump-Pence administration be?

I recently attended a very large suburban parish in Florida that has 2,000 people attending a service. There's a crying room for children. There's a video screen that shows their mission statement. Do people know what our statement of position and purpose is?

At one time we had regional meetings four times a year that helped to build connections in our region.

Many women attend Come to the Table on Sunday morning who do not want to attend our liturgy on Sunday nights for several reasons. Some do not find the time convenient. That is Dignity, too. Some straight people do not feel comfortable coming to the LGBTQI Center where we hold Come to the Table.

Our energy is idling. We are comfortable and a good place to be. People are comforted and supported here. We could reach out more to marginalized people. There's not a lot of growth, energy, and passion right now.

The combination of Catholic identity, LGBTQI identity, progressiveness, and independence is unique to Dignity.

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?

So many people came into this community sad and downtrodden, thinking they were garbage. To see people accept themselves is a beautiful thing.

We have produced leaders of many other organizations, like Matt Foreman, formerly of the NGLTF and now with the Haas Fund. New York City Councilmember Danny Dromm is an alum. Andy Humm, reporter for the Gay City News and host of the cable show Gay USA, is a former board member. When Cleve Jones wanted to get the word out about the AIDS Quilt, he went first to Dignity chapters.

Brian McNaught of Dignity/Detroit was the first LGBTQI liaison to a mayor in the U.S.

In the 1990s, Cardinal O'Connor gave a homily on Gay Pride Sunday saying that Catholics should not be mocking or antagonistic towards us. We wrote and thanked him. That started a dialogue that helped to change the New York State Hate Crimes Law to include sexual orientation, helped to pass the Sexual Orientation Nondiscrimination Act, and got the barriers taken down from around St. Patrick's Cathedral during the Pride March. We also helped to get NAMBLA removed from the Pride March.

I heard about Dignity in college, about 5 years ago, but had a safe island in my local parish. Then I went to a conference at Steubenville and was traumatized. I went six months not being involved with Catholicism at all, then I came to Dignity. I don't know if a lot of young LGBTQI Catholics know that Dignity exists.

What is the personal impact for me as a young person? For all the young people in Dignity I know, this is the place that saved their ability to practice their faith and their identity as faithful Catholics. There are still a lot of people consumed by self-hate, shaped by very traditional Catholicism. This organization is incredibly important. We'll never know the full impact. We only see the tip of the iceberg. How many lives have we saved of people who were inclined to suicide?

There is tremendous respect for us a national brand, on the political scene, and on the LGBTQI scene. Marianne has been to the White House. We are a critical mass in opposition to what the hierarchy is trying to stuff down the entire Church's throat. Although not large in numbers, we are critically important – the only organization fighting for us on a national level.

5. What clues might the Spirit be giving us?

1. There's hope. 2. There's a lot of work to do. How do we leverage our energy and resources?

This is a difficult time for all churches and religious organizations. People are becoming more secular. They're not finding what their inner spirit is saying in the churches. "Why should I have somebody else tell me who God should be?"

We say, if you want to have God in your life, there is a way to do that that is true to who you are.

We have only one ordained priest serving regularly as a presider right now, when we used to have more than a dozen. That is a clue. It is forcing us to expand and be creative in terms of presiders and lay-led liturgies. If you want to continue you have to do something about it.

There's a high rate of suicide now, not only among LGBTQI people but throughout the population. How do we be part of that conversation with the nation actively thinking about it because of recent celebrity suicides?

Mayor De Blasio recently announced that there will be a city-supported center for LGBTQI youth. Is this something we could be involved with?

We need to give ourselves credit for "raising the kids." The LGBTQI ministries in the parishes would not exist without us. And we should think about "welcoming the kids back home" sometime. We could invite people from those communities, or at least the leaders, to participate in events with us. It would be good to know where they're at, and vice versa.

People at the LGBTQI ministries in the parishes always say to me, "If it weren't for you, we wouldn't exist."

Next year is World Pride in NYC and the 50th Anniversary of Stonewall. Four million visitors to the city are expected. How will we participate? What kind of leadership can we offer?

Next year is also the 50th Anniversary of DignityUSA, with our Jubilee Conference in Chicago. Before that, we will be hosting the third Assembly of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics, representing forty countries from around the world. Many of us will be participating directly in those events, and all of us will be affected by them.

SESSION FEEDBACK FORM

(To be completed following each Segment discussion)

Approximately what percentage of your community participated? 25%. How productive was this conversation for your community? As a facilitator, what worked well and why.

We used a similar format to what we did for Part I. We met late on Sunday afternoon at our home church for an hour of discussion, then shared a light supper before liturgy. We did not use a panel format this time since the focus was not particularly on the recollections of our senior members, but on the thoughts of all members. We all sat in our church space. Lewis Speaks-Tanner moderated the discussion and Jeff Stone took notes.

The community found the discussion to be productive and provocative. I think the Jubilee discussions are really helping to focus us on our local and chapter issues as well as national ones.

What would you do differently next time? Consider both the preparation, the actual conversation and follow-up. This format worked well for us and we will use it again.

What are your suggestions for improving the supporting materials, process and the discussion they were meant to encourage? The materials are more than adequate. We can't think of anything to change.