



Discussion Recording Form

Date 6/27/2018

Chapter or Community Dignity San Fernando Valley

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?

The Dignity San Fernando Valley community met after liturgy on Saturday, June 9, 2018 to discuss the questions posed in Segment Two. We ordered pizza and enjoyed a casual meal together while considering the questions posed.

In response to this first question, one member pointed out that in the 1960s and 1970s Dignity was part of the institutional church, holding meetings, events, and liturgy on church property. In the 1980s we were “kicked out.” Another member noted “we were tolerated” in the beginning. A third member stated that after the Halloween letter we “were an immigrant church.”

A longtime member of the community noted that in the early decades Dignity was much bigger and much more integrated, with parents and other family members attending when the liturgies were conducted on church property. Parish priest presided until Cardinal Mahoney prohibited them from doing so in Los Angeles.

When Dignity was disinvited from Catholic church property, members wondered “what would happen if we went to a non-Catholic church for Mass?” These were very real questions for many members at that chaotic, challenging time.

One member noted that HIV and AIDS were causes for activism among Dignity communities. With the medical advances in treatment, that is less of an immediate need now.

One member noted that in the time of the AIDS crisis “the institutional church made some very bad decisions,” and this “evolved how I view church.” Dignity members grew to a place of greater ownership of their faith in the face of these deadly challenges.



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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?

When this question was posed, one longtime member quickly responded that “it’s not an option. We have to have the passion if we are going to continue to exist.”

Another member noted that with some of the earlier obstacles and challenges gone – HIV, legal protections, etc. – it changed the immediacy of the need for many LGBT organizations, not just Dignity. Perhaps a new purpose or focus was needed.

One member said, “We’re a little island. Dignity/LA is another island. DignityUSA isn’t connecting anyone.” This sparked a conversation about the role of the national organization and the local chapters. “It’s always been the complaint,” said one member. “We don’t get support from national.” This prompted another member to quickly interject, “It’s on us. We are the church.”

Another member made that point that “worship is the engine. Mass is the engine. First and foremost we are Christians.” He went on to point out that “nowhere is Christ mentioned in these questions.”

As the conversation continued about the relationship of chapters to the national organization, one member suggested that DignityUSA could share posts from local chapters on social media as a simple step toward promoting and integrating the disparate communities.

There was a time where one of Dignity’s greatest purposes was providing a safe place for LGBT people to gather and be their authentic selves. As more churches and worship communities have welcomed LGBT people, they don’t necessarily need Dignity, one member pointed out.

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?

A longtime member said that “Dignity is relevant as long as we think it’s relevant. As long as we need it.”

Another member, who had remained quiet for much of the initial conversation, shared that he came to Dignity “because of Prop 8,” the California ballot measure that defined marriage as between a man and a woman in 2008. This member had been active in a local parish until then, “but they [the clergy] were reading those letters” from the pulpit, he shared, referring to the Los Angeles archdiocese effort to promote the anti-gay measure. Feeling disillusioned, this member sought out Dignity, affirming the continued relevance of our small, local chapter.

This same member asked, “Where are the young people? When we die, is that it [for the chapter]?”

Members agreed that the primary challenges are the graying of the membership. Will there be others to continue the life of the chapter? Is it okay if there isn’t?

One of the community’s members is scheduled to have serious back surgery in the coming days. At tonight’s liturgy the community participated in an anointing of this member. Several agreed that such actions are examples of the community’s continued relevance and importance.

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?

When this question was posed, a member who had remained quiet spoke up: “For me, it’s like a spiritual renewal every time I come here. I get strength from coming here.”

Another member pointed out that the community has been present at many Pride events in the past.

“Every time Rome says something negative,” one member noted, “Dignity is there. We are valued by the media. That has a huge impact.”

A longtime member noted that dating back before there was any marriage equality, Dignity maintained a registry of commitment ceremonies. This collective archive was an important way to value and acknowledge our love relationships before legal protections caught up with us.

Another member said that Dignity was “an alternative voice to the religious right, a voice that is legitimately religious,” but also LGBT, serving as a “counter to fundamentalism.”

One member who had been relatively quiet throughout the evening said, “We are part of the Catholic community. When I am coming here, I’m not thinking about the Catholic Church. I don’t care what the pope says. We are the Catholic Church.”

Another member said simply, “The Catholic Church knows we exist.”

And someone replied, “I come here for all of you.”

That seemed like as good a place as any to end this segment.