

Taking Stock of Today

Dignity USA Jubilee Exercise

Dignity/Washington Chapter Response

Date: Sunday, July 22, 2018
Time: 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm
Venue: St. Margaret's Church
Participants: 16 members

Facilitator: Martin Witchger
Note Taker: Daniel Barutta

The meeting began with a brainstorming session where members were asked to write down on Post-It's the strengths & challenges for either Dignity/Washington or DignityUSA as both groups are today.

Strengths:

- We are well organized.
- Many noted and appreciated that we are financially stable.
- We have youth members involved, are included, and are in leadership!
- Some noted our diversity as a strength – we have a lot of people with different experiences (but note diversity is also in the challenges below).
- We value our history, 46 years of lived experience — and we have archives of it all!
- Several noted our meaningful liturgies.
 - Many also noted we are fortunate to have an abundant number of clergy/ presiders — and the diversity of presiders (including our woman presider!) as a strength
- A few mentioned our strong Catholic core – that our liturgies look more like a parish church.
- We have a Dignity Center – a building that is ours that we can use as a center; and host other ally groups, and offer for others.
- Many also noted our strong sense of community, that we are open and welcoming to newcomers
- Some noted our abundance of activities
- One noted our communities' willingness to learn & grow in the changing LGBT community
- One also noted that we have a strong membership and are nationally active

Challenges and/or opportunities

- We discussed the nature of our relationship with the Archdiocese, and some's views on how that is challenging in our identity. Are we an intentional community? There is still a split between 2 (or more) ways of looking at who we are right now. We have a letter to Cardinal Wuerl to try and establish a dialogue with the Archdiocese.
 - That discussion continued with: How Catholic are we and what does it mean to be Catholic? Someone lamented that we have picked and chosen certain rites and celebratory styles.
- A challenge brought up by many was the aging membership — and the need for more participation by members. Corresponding to this is the decline in membership numbers and participation.
- Diversity is seen as a challenge by some (while seen as strength or both by others). We need more young people, and struggle with retaining folks of racial, gender, and sexual identity diversity.
 - One noted that we are a transient city, especially among young people, and that we've lost some youth leadership
 - Some thought that we weren't welcoming or that people that were not white or male did not feel very comfortable at Dignity.
 - One member lamented that he's one of the only Gen-X'ers. Would like the young adults to be expanded into late 30s and 40s or have a group just for folks in those decades.
- A major opportunity discussed was the need to do more outreach – more opportunities to spread the word about Dignity (locally & nationally) and who we are. To youth, women, Parish Catholics
 - A corresponding challenge (locally and nationally) to this is that we're not as unique of a community — a lot of other faith communities are now accepting LGBTQI people.
 - We can be invisible to the LGBTQI Community and to the large Catholic Community.
- One noted the challenge of communication among the community, and the need for more leadership.
- Our Dignity Center, while seen as a strength, can also be a liability especially now that we face some major renovation options and costs.
- One member noted the challenge (for him, at least) of knowing, serving, and understanding transgender folks. He noted how we started as just “gay and lesbian” Catholics, and have now broad diversity of gender & sexual identity we try to address.
 - So more education and understanding on gender identity is still a challenge and opportunity.
- Some mentioned feeling disconnected from DignityUSA – raised the question: How many of us can name the staff and the current Board Members? One remarked this may be a side effect of the structure, moving away from regional delegates.

The above exercise created a lot of discussion, and took up more than the expected time. So the group only had time to discuss two of the pre-arranged discussion questions. See below:

1) How is Dignity/USA different today – our Chapter?

- There used to be regional delegates that seemed to have better communication with Dignity/USA.
- One member mentioned that we've made so much progress, that there is now more a sense of complacency in our community. There is less activism now that LGBTQI are more accepted. The atmosphere in the total movement is different because we have achieved so much.
 - Another member noted, though, that the male, white gay community may have enjoyed progress but not all sub-groups in our community are feeling the same progress. There is still a lot of activism in queer, people of color, and trans communities.
 - One noted that these causes could be taken up by Dignity and could help in some of our visibility and showing a more diverse group of people who we are that they are welcome at Dignity.
- Dignity/USA should be using the local chapters more – someone cited the United Nations event where Dignity/USA was invited but was not present.
- The challenge for both groups is accommodating too many different silos.

4) How has Dignity changed lives for the better?

- We have given a voice and presence to people who feel disenfranchised.
- There is a place to be loved and cared for.
- Dignity of the future needs to continue to be a place where people can find a spiritual home.
- One member born in another country expressed how isolated as a gay man among a Catholic family & culture, but how much he finally felt at home when finding Dignity/Washington.