

DignityUSA Jubilee 2nd Round of  
Consultations Summary  
*“Taking Stock Today”*

We’ve now completed the second of three community consultations and we are happy to report that to date 19 chapters and 4 caucuses have submitted a summary of their discussions! We also conducted an August 13 conference call for national members (those who are members but do not identify with a chapter or caucus) to gain their insights and engage them in the process.

These conversations focused primarily on the current state of our movement and the challenges that have changed us. Responding to feedback we received from a number of our chapters and caucuses, we adapted some of the original questions and also encouraged them to modify the questions to relate more closely to their communities and current context. This helped to make these conversations more varied in their content, but also added a richness and broader scope to their insights, ideas and conclusions.

This report provides representative themes and quotes that summarize these varied conversations. There are also unique inputs noted here. You are welcome to review the posted reports on the DignityUSA website for more detail and to provide a broader context for this summary.

We continue to hear very positive feedback from many communities about these conversations, saying that the experience has brought people together in a very meaningful and moving way.

**How is Dignity (locally and nationally) different today than it was in the past? How is your chapter or caucus different?**

- Technology has been a key driver; “The internet and social media have totally changed the way we connect with our ‘tribe’.”; social media allows us to communicate broadly, rapidly and inexpensively; immediacy is more important today with an urgency to quickly get the word out to media including social media.
- The political and social environment has changed much for the better of LGBTQI people (at least for now); marriage equality, emergence of non-traditional families, more civil protections locally and some nationally (although threatened today), greater acceptance of LGBTQI people and issues per national and local polls.
- “Building our local communities, hiring a strong Executive Director, building a strong national Board and stepping up our investment in and use of technology and social media to spread our message.”
- “We have experienced shifts in religious philosophy, in a more diverse community and in a more socially active community.”
- “Blessing of a smaller community is a closer group of faithful friends to connect and share their lives with; we have a more well-defined “infrastructure” and offer consistent events for members and friends to participate with.”
- Have seen more effectiveness in working through coalitions, and other partnerships with national, faith-based, progressive organizations (e.g. Federation of Christian Ministries).
- Many Chapters are smaller but have survived and continue to carry on the important functions that people wish to have.
- “Issues today are different, e.g. we celebrate Transgender Day of Remembrance, we do more networking (at gay and straight events), the issues of what families are is different (due to gay marriage), more non-traditional families feel free to come out and come to ‘church’.”
- Shifts: unworthy to worthy, invisible to visible, needing approval to honoring our own sacred space.
- Chapter worship and community life in welcoming congregations has provided the opportunity for outreach, shared programming and interactions across faith communities
- “We have gone from seeking an inclusive community, to a desire to be included in the Catholic church, to creating our own Catholic church.”

- “There seems to be less need for activism and more of a need for a strong, trusted and reliable voice on behalf of members.”
- LGBT → LGBTQI; representative of shifts within the community and interest in greater inclusivity.
- Sense of limitations because of aging membership, and challenges to attracting younger members.
- “Fewer people arriving at our door, those who still find us are motivated by the same reason: a desire to worship as part of an LGBTQ community.”
- “The change in me is I lost my shame. That was a big issue when I came into acceptance of my homosexuality. That internalized homophobia was hard to shake. At this point in my life, I’m a lot less ashamed and freer.”
- “We are involved in many charitable groups and have allies from other faiths attending our ‘Eucharistic Celebrations’... We have people from all walks of life. We have more transgendered Christians attending our services than other faith communities in Pittsburgh. We are VIABLE and is needed in Pittsburgh.”
- “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.”
- Embraced intersectional justice issues which has strengthened us; civil rights, feminism, women’s leadership in the Church.
- More progressive and expanded liturgical practices; more women presiding and lay-led liturgies.
- Deepening understanding and appreciation of transgender persons and issues – and their gifts – leading to more welcoming communities, pastoral care and learning that are enriching everyone.
- People don’t seem to join groups in the same way as before; different ways of connecting and interacting.
- Continued discussion regarding the viability of reaching out to members of the hierarchy, or local parishes.
- Fewer people identify as Catholic and they don’t feel they need the approval of the Church.
- We were the “only game in town”; now we compete with other multiple welcoming faith communities including “sanctioned” ministry to LGBTQ Catholics sponsored by local dioceses.
- 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.
- LGBTQI people are more accepted/mainstreamed, depending on location; evolution of the LGBT “identity”, i.e. changed from not worthy to worthy and of value, moved from invisible to visible.
- “Caucus expanded so we have many women voices. Chapters have educated members on women and trans-more acceptance.”

### **Is the mission and purpose of DignityUSA still relevant today?**

- “We remain very relevant because the larger church has issues with LGBTQI's and with women as equals. Dignity is more progressive as a movement as needs to continue to set an example. Time and resources are needed to heighten our profile.”
- “There is still need for affirming, LGBTQIA-positive theology and education to counter outdated church teaching; 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.”
- “While there has been increased recognition for gay and lesbian persons, transgender, intersex, and queer/questioning/asexual persons are still finding their places in society, and often face violence and misunderstanding.”
- “DUSA’s statements in response to whatever hurtful rhetoric comes from the Vatican are an example of the voice that the other parish cannot express.”
- “We continue to minister to our community members as difficulties arise in their lives. This continues to make us relevant and needed.”

- “Dignity has been a media contact nationally and locally, a way to publicize scandals and injustices.”
- “I’m back in the Church because of Dignity. I never really stopped being Catholic. It’s a call to ministry, a chance to minister.”
- “We provide confidence to people struggling with catholic theology and what it means in their life.”
- “We are definitely needed for the "FAITH LIFE" of our members. We engage all wherever they are in their spiritual journey. We help members who don't have family support. We have been extremely supportive of the transgender community. We are there when members are sick and need help.”
- “It is definitely still relevant today-with 31 states still able to fire a person today for being gay, we still have a lot of work to do.”
- “Giving LGBT people more self-dignity – un-reliant on Church sanction but rather the Grace of a loving God.”
- “I know I’m not alone. I can be myself and know that I have a good religious home. I have that security. I’m not wanting to be an island on my own.”
- The media, locally and nationally, still seeks us out as the go-to voice of LGBTQI Catholics.
- Dignity remains a place for integrating one’s sexuality and spirituality.
- “Yes, but in a more diverse world, we need to find the ways of opening our doors to a population that might see church differently from ours. How do we work to serve the LGBTQIA community in a world with more open and inviting faith communities?”
- Continued discussion/debate regarding our role within and outside the institutional Church; implications for our mission and where we focus our efforts, i.e. do we focus on local parish engagement, or engagement with bishops?; are we reformers committed to living our vision of Church or reformers calling the Church to “negotiate”
- The combination of Catholic identity, LGBTQI identity, progressiveness and independence is unique to Dignity.
- Our national Dignity leadership and the many tasks they take on and accomplish so admirably. They are the national-level voice for our local identities.
- Local Dignity communities have been expanding their tent, looking for people who are alienated from the traditional Church, who are not necessarily LGBTQI; e.g. divorced people, women.
- Interest in exploring other progressive groups who share our values as potential allies or partners.
- “How do we grow to make us stay relevant? When people have other Christian communities that welcome LGBTQI people, what makes them want to stay here?”
- “There is sometimes tension felt between a primary mission of creating a LGBTQI community that welcomes others, and a “progressive inclusive Catholic community” that includes LGBTQI Catholics as much as it does others who share progressive and inclusive values.”
- We remain the go-to resource, voice and support nationally and locally; e.g. supporting an elderly gay Catholic man who reached out to Dignity/Denver about his fears that he would be denied Catholic burial.

### **How would you describe the current state of your chapter/caucus?**

- There is a shared concern among many chapters about how our community’s numbers have diminished and how members are aging; impacts on liturgy attendance, pool of new leaders (local and those who could be exported to national roles), limited capacity for ministries, etc.
- While smaller communities, commitment to offering liturgy on a regular basis remains strong
- “There is great spirit in our community and good friendships. While it would be good to strive for new members, let’s remember to continue what we are doing to create a great atmosphere.”
- Chapter communities remain a reliable source of support for many people, even people who do not regularly attend liturgy
- Continue to value liturgy and commitment to be an open and welcoming community.

- “Our engine 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.
- “‘Engine Running’ is a two –edged sword-our outreach is good, but need more “drivers” to keep engine running.”
- Continuing discussion: how Catholic are we and what does it mean to be Catholic?; what should our relationship be to the local Church?
- “The Women of Dignity never gave up – someone always kept the flame going.”
- Focus on the positives around the life of the current community; e.g. “we identified several categories of our ‘favorite things’ about the community which included: liturgy, spiritual feeding, communal activities and family; outreach to the larger community around them.”
- Questions that were raised: how interrelated are the various chapters around the country? Are chapters isolated islands or an integrated network?
- Many Dignity chapters that are small in membership and yet very vibrant in their faith lives. Many chapters have large numbers of women members.
- “We need to ask ourselves if we are following up with visitors who don't come back, and if we are communicating with members who have ceased attending, at least for a time.”
- Recognition that we are “aging” out; predominance in many of our communities of “older” members and the need for engaging and welcoming young adults and a new generation of leaders and voices.
- Using Social Media more but need to build our capabilities and better leverage these communication and networking tools.
- Continued interest in responding to the needs of LGBTQI Catholics while there are also multiple other affirming faith communities locally.
- “We need to tell our story more often and more effectively. We need to do Gay Catholic 101 especially for newer and younger members.”
- The 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.
- Continue to struggle with when, how, if engagement with or outreach to the institutional Church or hierarchy happens or needs to be pursued.

**What are the opportunities and the challenges you see ahead?**

<b>Strength/Opportunities</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued resilience in spite of losses of people and those who provide ministry; political threats to LGBTQI rights</li> <li>• Financial stability</li> <li>• Pride in our history and legacy which is archived</li> <li>• National is highly professional and supportive of chapters; resources, consulting, website</li> <li>• Better leverage social media</li> <li>• Continued passion for our mission and a commitment to service</li> <li>• Continued strong leadership structure</li> <li>• Age, race, class and gender diversity</li> <li>• Prophetic voice</li> <li>• Welcoming diversity in all forms</li> <li>• National Conferences</li> <li>• Strong, persistent communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining or growing memberships especially as people age out</li> <li>• Keep fires burning; fellowship</li> <li>• Keep people engaged</li> <li>• Hostile political environment</li> <li>• Ongoing publicity; making people aware of who we are and our presence in the LGBTQI community</li> <li>• Smaller communities requiring that everyone take on a role and share their gifts, which can be a strength</li> <li>• Recruiting new talent</li> <li>• Reaching out to new members of all ages, cities, etc.</li> <li>• Understand how to properly interact within diversity; pronouns; increased diversity</li> <li>• Lack of agility</li> <li>• Succession planning</li> <li>• Attracting young adults who in general seem less interested in a church community</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dignity “brand”</li> <li>• Dignity is needed more than ever to help people remain connected to the Church; opportunity to “advertise”; building community, sharing information/resources that are correct and enriching</li> <li>• Creative outreach to LGBTQI people focusing on shared experiences and needs</li> <li>• Hope in the younger generation together with ability to quickly respond to issues with activism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More energy in the past/history; harder to energize people beyond core offerings like liturgy</li> <li>• Competition from inclusive denominations</li> <li>• Continue to clarify and demonstrate the value of the relationship between national and local communities</li> <li>• Disconnect between Pope Francis’s friendlier message and the stance of U.S. Bishops</li> <li>• Convincing LGBTQI Catholics, especially young adults, that the Church can change.</li> <li>• Keep the fires burning</li> <li>• “Fight fatigue”</li> <li>• Structure needed to support young women and isolated women</li> </ul>
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**How has Dignity (local communities and the movement) changed lives for the better? What has been our impact on the Church and the LGBTQI social justice movement?**

- We continue to be a place of safety and spiritual affirmation
- Multiple examples of impacts locally regarding providing community leaders, influencing a local bishop to dialogue, contributing politically and supporting passage of pro-LGBTQ legislation, etc.
- “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; although not large in numbers, we are critically important – the only organization fighting for us on a national level.
- “When I was first coming out after hiding and feeling alone, I found Dignity and I helped establish the first chapter in Columbus Ohio. Dignity helped me not commit suicide! Dignity helps others to integrate our sexuality and our spirituality.”
- “Dignity Detroit has contributed money, goods and services to many charitable institutions in our area. Currently, we have members of the refugee community from Freedom House attending Mass and other activities with us, and we support them financially and other ways. We actively support services for the homeless offered at one of our presider’s downtown parish. We provide money and goods to local GLBT organizations.”
- “The 21 priests who preside at our liturgies have frequently told us that we inspire them.”
- “Dignity locally has provided a supportive place for LGBTQ to be accepted and to have their spiritual needs met. LGBTQI persons supported each other during the AIDS crisis, when our Lesbian members ministered to our Gay members. We are not sure we have achieved major change in the Catholic community, but DignityUSA does give us a national voice and presence to impact LGBTQI social justice.”
- “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.”
- “For me, it’s like a spiritual renewal every time I come here. I get strength from coming here.”
- “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.”
- “The community has grown in both, gay and straight directions, fostering understanding and acceptance and really living the Word of God.”
- “I am more comfortable with the knowledge that God loves me just as I am...’*thanks in great part to the presence and access to Dignity*’.”

- “Dignity’s existence has given LGBTQ+ Catholics HOPE and a sense that RC dogma can/should be questioned and that one can feel safe to not obey.”
- “We receive calls locally and from across the country, looking to find comfort and solace and a listening ear; we recently stepped up for a stranger seeking a Catholic presence for his funeral that he, as a gay man, couldn’t find within his family/parish.”

**Knowing our history, and after focusing on the current state of Dignity, what are the “clues” God’s Spirit is giving to guide us into the future?**

- “We have to believe that the Spirit is in charge and we have to let Her orchestrate. We love the “FLUIDITY” on letting the Spirit guide us.”
- “The Spirit’s a free-ranging bird. Not a trained falcon sitting on the arm of a bishop.”
- “Our 21<sup>st</sup> century challenge is to identify fear and model love widely.”
- “Offer young people a safe place to be listened to and respected. You’ll go where you’re fed.” (YAC)
- Commit to more ecumenical/interfaith involvement as a means of building allies and partners.
- “We recommend that our Jubilee convention in Chicago in 2019 include a strong resolution and big, juicy press release thanking the other churches and organizations who for 50 years have opened their facilities to Dignity events; we have absolutely relied on them as the Roman hierarchy removed the facilities it controls from use by our segment of God’s Church.”
- Commit to a more diverse DignityUSA board and leadership.
- “There have been instances in the past where the chapter was feeling some financial constraints and considering some drastic options. Things then turned out that funds became available to the chapter in the form of bequests from the estates of deceased members. This “miraculous” gain of funds at the neediest moment could be a clue from the Spirit.”
- “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.”
- “In a more diverse world, we need to find the ways of opening our doors to a population that might see church differently from ours. How do we work to serve the LGTQIA community in a world with more open and inviting faith communities?”
- “If we consider a “Life, death, resurrection” model, where is our journey leading, and what are we transforming into?”
- More focus on: intersectionality, family/childcare, becoming an authority on the theology of sexuality, gender, justice for all marginalized people; education/online programs (e.g. “virtual CCD on sexual ethics”; “Wholistic and body theology”); Queer Catholic Camp, Queer Family Camp. (YAC)
- “Need to increase opportunities to connect – more phone liturgies or discussions or conversations.” (Women)
- “Need to dialogue on local and national level - it is the key.” (Women)
- DignityUSA organization of people/areas where chapter accessibility is hard or impossible. (YAC)
- Queer Multicultural Community allying with other organizations –refugee /immigrant organizations (YAC)
- Being a place for young families and our kids. (YAC)
- There are a number of trans justice issues related to Catholic institutions that we need to keep our eye on; e.g. formal programs of support for trans youth in Catholic institutions, Catholic adoption agencies not allowing LGBTQ families to adopt, and Catholic hospitals denying transgender people access to health care. (Transgender)
- “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.”