



## Discussion Recording Form

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Chapter or Community: Columbus, Ohio

### SEGMENT THREE: DISCERNING THE PATH FORWARD

Facilitator / Recorder Worksheet

There were 9 members present for this discussion. It was our longest conversation to date.

The early consensus was that there is still a very important mission for DignityUSA to pursue in service to the LGBTQ Catholic community – and larger LGBTQ community – and that is to be our voice and remain engaged as a voice that challenges the leadership of the largest Christian denomination in the world on issues of sexuality and faith. We must add to LGBTQ an A for allies as they have become an important part of our progress and movement. They have been and will continue to change us and vice versa through our work together.

**1. When we last met we talked about key challenges and opportunities we saw ahead. Those were.... How do we need to change to tackle the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities?**

- **Relationship to “church”** or “Church” is critical. What is it? Within our community there is a variety of desired relationships from “We must be connected to the apostolic succession” to “I have no need or desire to be in relationship with Church – but do seek relationship in “church”. One of our members – a convert – said he really misses a church community and eucharist but he simply cannot affiliate in any way with an institution with this record on women’s issues and sexual hypocrisy and abuse and coverup etc. We must consider our mission with that in mind. What kind of relationship do we have now? Is that what we want? Is that what will facilitate our growth?
- **The Chapter model is not going to take us far** into our future as a source for funding and volunteers. We must identify and embrace a new operating model that will. We say this in light of current demographics that show the dwindling of our chapters, for the most part, as we age. There are exceptions to that and we can perhaps learn from them. Each local community has been shaped by the needs and context of the local community served. These are each unique. For example, in Columbus, years back a Bishop made the decision not to invite religious communities into the Diocese so we have a dearth of them in comparison

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to Cleveland and Cincinnati. Columbus was never a Catholic city like the others. So we really struggled to find priests – which led to the practice of having lay men and women or a married priest preside. Point being – what works in one city may or may not work in another. The word “chapter” is an aging concept like the word “member”. It doesn’t generally resonate with Millennials. We discussed some alternatives. The HRC model was tossed around – where the national organization is poised as a “lobbyist” for change with local “steering committees”. HRC works hard to align the work at the national level with work at the local level. This could work with the notion of Dignity being a voice and dynamic for change in the Church – more than a place of worship/sanctuary. We think that the need to mobilize and connect in personal locally should be met by those with that need. National should consider taking that off its plate as a to-do except to the degree it is believed to be critical to achieving the mission.

- The human **resistance to Change** will also be a challenge for us. We believe that USA may continue to encounter resistance from some local communities due to aging members who don’t want to or don’t know how to “let go” of what served them well. Humans tend not to change until the pain of current state exceeds the pain of change. With Dignity, we believe change will be motivated only when we align around a compelling purpose for the future. We no longer meet as a worshipping community. We meet in homes to socialize and stay connected. There is little energy for changing the Church anymore. Our stage in life has greatly lessened the need for institutional approval or sanction. Many have found places of worship outside the parish community – but not all. Point is that the things that fired our engines 15-20 years ago don’t much anymore as our physical and emotional energy wanes. LGBTQ people are much more accepted in society today and the credibility of the Church authorities has been hugely undermined by the sexual predator crisis. We have to take an honest stock of where we are today and tune a mission and purpose that people want to invest in with their \$ and energy. We still do with our \$ and to some extent with our talent as well. We have contributed board members and staff members to the work of USA and still do.
- **Communications.** With a diversity of generations, we have a lot of different communication habits and formats – which USA already knows and has worked to adapt to. This will continue. Two of us noted that when we come home from work, facing email all day – the last things we want to do is get on e-mail at home. There is a mix of degree of use of social media. Those who do use it tend to do so to keep track of family members and friends. We see Dignity supports coming from a wide variety of landscapes – not primarily from Chapters. Therefore communication will be increasingly critical to our ability to mobilize, message and fund-raise. What is the cost of using multiple communication channels? What resources are required? One note of caution: A member said “everyone wants a piece of us! Information overload! I am fatigued and frustrated about what is happening in DC. Experience hopelessness.”
- **Generations:** The Baby Boomer generation that built DUSA is not the future of DUSA, except in our wills. Our needs have been significantly met. We see Indy

rallying around a crisis and is attracting younger people. Do we need a crisis to mobilize? We see new needs in younger generations. “We want to be married at Dignity”. “We want to catechize our children at Dignity.” Etc. While we have many married couples in the chapter. One has adult children. The rest of us do not. How likely are we to create a community that is responsive to the needs of younger generations? **We believe these generations need to lead the way.** It is time for us to follow. We support it but the next wave of Dignity’s service is not our parade to lead. Millennials connect in different ways. We need to study and come to understand how millennials needs and values and perspective are different from boomers to help us understand how to more effectively understand the other and work well together – around a shared mission we all care about strongly.

- **Language:** Choice of words. LGBTQIA. Who are we including? Excluding? This is a generational issue. We must take the lead of future generations and women when it comes to language adjustments – in light of gender fluidity. Increasingly you can’t make assumptions based on what you see.

Some ideas to consider:

- Merge forces through increased collaboration and connection with allies in the work. Similar organizations are feeling similar forces of change. How can we reduce expenses and optimize resources and “magnify the voice” by working better together – even merging? Equally Blessed is a model. Kindred orgs: CTA, New Ways, Future Church, Fortunate Families, PFLAG. To merge perhaps we expand the mission – like creating a “welcoming and inclusive church” which includes allies, parents, families, progressives etc.
- Allies: strategy to continue to tap into accepting and welcome Catholics. But not just with our hand out. What do they care about and how can we support them in their spiritual quest?
- Could Dignity partner with a retreat house that would serve to regenerate our work?
- Designate an estate gift to fund specific initiatives/projects related to our evolution – like conducting a study of the needs of our allies?
- International collaboration appears to be a recent possibility worth serious consideration. How could this magnify our voice in an international organization? However – this is incredibly more complex to manage.
- Safe Space: Dignity got started creating safe spaces. There is still a need for that for many segments of our community. Safe spaces for women, transgender, etc. Its not that same issues as in the 70’s and 80’s where one could be jailed or murdered for being perceived as gay – and men bore the brunt of that discrimination. What are today’s safety needs and how can we best provide “sanctuary” as society continues to evolve? There are many places yet in the country where LGBTQIA people don’t feel safe. One of ours mentioned Texas as an example – or Alabama.

**2. What should the key priorities of DignityUSA be in the next few years? What's most important to us; what values from our rich history do we want to ensure are carried forward?**

- We need a Voice! – advocacy for inclusion – Being “church” without requiring me to sacrifice my own integrity.
- We need a NATIONAL voice, if not international.

Core values:

- **Eucharist** is a high value to all we believe.
- **Inclusion:** women had to push their way into our organization in earlier days. Trans people are now pushing their way in. SO: - when someone is pushing – we should pay attention – there is a new need. Be open to this movement of the Spirit. We have had a history of resistance – which is human. Perhaps we should cultivate inclusiveness as a core organizational value and tie that to an ever expanding tent? The “other” is where opportunity lies. One of our women noted that most women she knows don't know about Dignity and if they come they don't stay “because we don't see ourselves included in Dignity or in the larger Church.” “Why would women want to be part of an organization that is seeking reunion or reconciliation with a misogynistic institution?” This is not news to any of us – and frustrating to the men of our chapter. We have tried to welcome and attract women. It is an ongoing challenge. Has this changed in any way with younger generations? Are we bringing our assumptions to the table when they no longer really hold true?
- **Alliance with Social Justice in its arrays of forms...**
- **Learning and Flexibility:** Leadership should focus on the dynamics of change w intent to understand how to facilitate it so we manage it and not the other way around. One good book is Managing Transitions by William Bridges and Susan Bridges. Consider how change initiatives impact the potential for fund raising. How might a broader mission or alliances broaden our appeal to funders?
- **Spirituality of “letting go”:** We can't grow without being willing to let go. Letting go is core to the spiritual path. How can we tap into that rich tradition to cultivate a willingness to change?

**Engaging authority:** LCWR has adopted a two point stance of engaging in dialogue with Church authority without sacrificing their integrity. Our need for integrity is why most of us went into exile in the first place.

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**3. What resources do we need to fuel our “engine” (passion and purpose) in the future? Why would people want to invest their life energy and financial resources in support of this desired future?**

Estates! Dignity sitting on a gold mine as boomers age. You know that. Continue to capitalize on it – perhaps by identifying a few broad initiatives that would inspire people to name Dignity in their will. Same thing applies to chapters that have significant assets to invest in a better future.

We have been in the desert. We have been building a road to the promised land. We are not there yet. There is a lot of injustice in the world. Not time to quit. Tie this into fundraising somehow. Most of us are now thinking about legacy. “I want to contribute to a legacy of a eucharistic faith community, rooted in the catholic tradition, that recognizes the goodness of each person.”

Broaden the mission through mergers to broaden the appeal to foundations. Look at foundations that support social justice and care about the role religious values have in its pursuit. What do these potential sources of funding care about? What might it suggest in terms of our broadening the tent? Foundations don’t fund staff – perhaps an endowment for future leadership needs?

Website: Build it into a resource center like HRC has – a public service that will attract information seekers that may not know much about us. Resources could be around supporting local organizing that our “stakeholders/members” care about. How would this resonate with younger generations? We could uniquely contribute to an LGBTQ theology. Are there other faith-based orgs that have done that? What can we learn from them? Collaborate? Has DUSA seen what HRC has published “Coming Home to Catholicism”?

**4. What is this community’s guidance to the national leadership as they create a strategic plan for the next few years of DignityUSA’s mission and work? Consider topics such as key commitments to mission, key goals, investments, financial resources, volunteer and leadership resources, talent recruitment and partnerships/outreach.**

EVERYTHING flows out of a **core PURPOSE** that will appeal to the needs of the future and a broader base of people who will be motivated to join the ranks and support the work. Look at Simon Sinek’s You Tube on the importance of the “Why?” to every organization. Re-examine the statement of position and purpose. How well does it resonate with younger generations? We commend the board for its recent update of this seminal piece and know a diversity of ages in leadership worked on it. Keep it under review – it must always align with everything else we do. If it strikes at



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the heart of what many people care about – it should be referenced frequently. Every thing we invest time and money in should be constructed in reference to this purpose. How does it support it? It should help set priorities.

**Grow an endowment** – using estates? We will always be limited if we are living paycheck to paycheck.

**Continue to be a VOICE** for LGBTQA people!

**Pursue partnerships** to economize on operating costs, leverage resources better and broaden the tent. This will require compromise of both organizations considering mergers.

**Engagement:** Develop a strategy for how local communities can move a visitor to involvement, to contribution, to volunteering, to major donor. One person noted that a professional organization they belong to does this: Whenever a new person arrives, someone is designated to welcome them and meet briefly afterwards with them to field any questions or interests. Careful not to scare them off – but something brought them in the first place. What was it? If you understand that, it can inform a retention strategy.

Focus on a **communication strategy** using social media and website – or whatever is needed. Seek a foundation to fund it?

Continued **leadership development** And recruitment. Link the importance of this to a passionate core purpose.





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3) What are your suggestions for improving the supporting materials, process, and the discussion they were meant to encourage?