



## Discussion Recording Form

### SEGMENT THREE: DISCERNING THE PATH FORWARD Facilitator / Recorder Worksheet

Dignity/New York

Submitted by Jeff Stone, Chapter Secretary

Date of discussion: November 18, 2018

Date of report: November 30, 2018

**KEY POINTS HIGHLIGHTED IN BOLD.**

**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?**

**\* We need to do a better job making people aware of what DignityUSA does—both within Dignity and outside it.** We need to work through all the digital media—Twitter, podcasts, Facebook, e-blasts, etc. We need to be doing this constantly. We need to be on everybody's smartphone and computer and iPad every day. Old school methods are also necessary, like sending Christmas and birthday cards to members. We also need to talk more about Dateline and the other DignityUSA communications in our local chapters, make announcements and reports.

**\* From a Young Adult member: We need to do a better job of making Dignity more accessible and easier to find. The first LGBTQI Catholic group I learned about in college about ten years ago was Courage.**

**\* We need to recognize and celebrate that we've done a lot right because we've been around for almost 50 years.** Many other LGBTQI religious organizations and other types of organizations no longer exist.

**\* Many parishes in our area are now welcoming LGBTQI people, but our mission is still unique because we can be totally open about saying what we believe and supporting LGBTQI people in all aspects of their lives. We need to emphasize this.**



## Discussion Recording Form

\* **From a Young Adult member: This early-thirties generation is experiencing a massive lack of community and a great hunger for community.** Changes in culture and technology are happening so rapidly that even 8 or 10 years' difference in ages can make a huge difference in experience. There is less church attendance and less interest in organizations among people in their early 30s and younger. Community becomes more important at certain points in life. **We need to emphasize that we offer real community.**

\* **We have always experienced a lot of deep friendship in Dignity. It's one of our greatest strengths and we need to figure out how to carry that forward in a changing world.**

\* Most of us in Dignity who are middle-aged and older love the Church because we were born into it and educated in it. Then we became angry and upset that we weren't included in it because we are LGBTQI. **People today are not so concerned at being excluded from the Church. They are more secular and don't necessarily want to be connected to the Catholic Church.**

\* **Even though people may not want to be connected to the Catholic Church, the hunger for a grace-filled community is there.**

\* **In LGBTQI media, any commentary about religion brings out huge vitriol about religion in general.** Many people in the LGBTQI community still ask, Why belong to an organization connected to religion? We need to answer this.

\* **The sexual abuse crisis has cost the Church a huge amount of credibility. Until it cleans house it cannot attract new people, and that includes us. We need to distinguish ourselves from the institutional Church.**

\* Many people are on a "spiritual but not religious" path. They're connecting with nature, or a "higher power" through twelve-step programs and so forth. The minute there's too much emphasis on the traditional, people are turned off. **Our Catholic language about sin has to change in order to attract people attracted to "spirituality but not religion."**

\* We began in service as well as providing sanctuary and support for LGBTQI Catholics. We served in soup kitchens, AIDS service organizations, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, prison ministry, and so on. Service brings life and grace. **We need to be doing service as well as prayer.** We need both action and contemplation, as Richard Rohr puts it.

**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**



## Discussion Recording Form

**to ensure are carried forward?**

- \* Retention of members—why do people stop coming? We need to find out and do our best to keep them.** “Exit interviews” of departing and former members could be very useful. Are their spiritual and community needs being met?
- \* Using technology to carry out our mission.** Our Come to the Table liturgies run by Patricia Russell and Mary Jane Brown are a great example of this. They have people participating remotely in their liturgies all over the country and the world. People are praying together and being prayed for at Dignity. That is very powerful and touching. Maybe this is a model that can be adapted more widely.
- \* We have done a wonderful job of interfacing with other organizations and should continue this. Local chapters could also be strengthened by doing this.** People can belong to Catholic parishes and also go to Dignity regularly or from time to time.
- \* Our independence is both a strength and a weakness. We are an all-volunteer organization. DignityUSA could give more advice and guidance to local chapters, including sharing best practices.**
- \* We have to evolve beyond being a network of chapters offering a Catholic Mass in major cities once a week.**
- \* There needs to be a liaison to DignityUSA in every chapter who reports on what DignityUSA has been doing in the past month or week.**
- \* We need to understand better how people are perceiving the communications and outreach of DignityUSA.** DignityUSA is putting out a lot of information but people are not necessarily reading it or paying attention to it.

**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?**

- \* We have become a prophetic movement for the whole Church and should continue to evolve in that direction.** We have been establishing models of worship and community that regular parishes don’t have. We have been compensating for what the bishops aren’t doing, especially for LGBTQI members but also for everyone. We have become strong intentional communities.



## Discussion Recording Form

\* **Saying “join us because we are not the official Catholic Church” is not good enough, not positive enough.** You have to tell people your vision of the future, communities where gender and sexual orientation don’t matter, a Catholic community that is truly inclusive and welcoming.

\* **The opportunity to give back so that other people can experience what I’ve experienced in Dignity over the past thirty years.**

**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.**

\* **Improved liaison with members and chapters, including national members.**

\* **Greater outreach to LGBTQI young adults, campus groups, other Catholic progressive groups, and secular LGBTQI groups.**

\* **Outreach to Latino Catholics, whose culture may at times be more conservative on LGBTQI issues.**

\* **Identifying our saints and other heroic figures, such as John McNeill and Mychal Judge from our own chapter, and declaring them saints of DignityUSA as well as the whole church.** This would be bold, inspiring, and affirming.

### SESSION FEEDBACK FORM

(To be completed following each Segment discussions)

1) Approximately what percentage of your community participated? 15% How productive was this conversation for your community? As a facilitator, what worked well and why?

The discussion was productive but we had only half as many participants as for the first two sessions (15 people vs. 30 for the first two). The fact that it took place the Sunday



## Discussion Recording Form

before Thanksgiving may have had something to do with this. Also, people may have felt that the relevant topics were covered in the first two sessions.

On the other hand, the conversation was held in a more intimate and comfortable space and was very engaging for all who participated.

- 2) What would you do differently next time? Consider both preparation, the actual conversation and follow-up.

The format of an hour-long discussion followed by an hour-long break with food and drink before our liturgy worked well. The suggested questions were excellent and helped to focus the discussion, although there was some overlap and we spent more time on the first two questions. Naturally people wanted to review the challenges first, also. With more time we might have come up with additional specific goals and priorities for DignityUSA.

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

The materials were excellent and more than sufficient. They seemed well suited to the goals of the process, i.e., to surface challenges, opportunities, and priorities.