

DignityUSA works for respect and justice for people of all sexual orientations, genders and gender identities—especially gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons—in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy, and support.

Introduction to This Issue

By Leo N. Egashira, Publications Committee Chair

Dear Readers:

This year-end issue of the *QV: Quarterly Voice* features articles by DignityUSA President Mark Matson, theologian and psychologist Daniel Helminiak, retired Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong, and Catholic gay blogger Michael Bayley, all of which address the heart of what it means to be identified as being part of the institutional church and how DignityUSA fits or does not fit into the amorphous definitions of Catholic or Roman Catholic. The four articles encompass the continuum of thought among the DignityUSA membership.



Leo Egashira

Except for Mark Matson's article about DignityUSA's adoption of a more inclusive Mission Statement, publication of articles herein does not constitute sanction or endorsement of DignityUSA, its Board members or membership. They are presented in *QV* without content editing to create a rich environment for critical analysis, reflection, and discussion. And, if they do generate discussion about who we are as people of faith and where we are headed, then the Publications Committee has succeeded in its continuing mission.

Three of the other articles are follow-ups of previously-discussed themes.

- The 2nd Quarter 2009 *QV* was a Transgender-themed issue. Immediately after it was published, a story about a 3rd grade transgender child in Omaha hit the press and television airwaves. There is a Catholic angle to the story, and we are reprinting articles from the June 2009 and November 2009 PFLAG-Omaha Newsletters.
- Dignity/Columbus member Joe Gentilini wrote a primer on "Write the Bishops? Why Bother???" in the 2nd Quarter 2008 *QV*. In this issue is an example of the dialogue he has been engaged in with individual bishops.
- The 3rd Quarter 2009 *QV* reported on DignityUSA's 40th Anniversary Convention. One of the attendees, Dennis Benoit, President of our sister organization Dignity/Canada/Dignité, offers his reflections on the gathering, which coincidentally touch upon what it means to be GLBT Catholics.

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Other pieces round out this jam-packed issue:

- Eric L. Hays-Strom's "An Erotic Encounter With the Divine," is a personal story of the integration of spirituality and sexuality.
- Two book reviews and an announcement of other published works of interest to the GLBT faith community.
- Preliminary report to USCCB by John Jay College of Criminal Justice on clergy sexual abuse study.

Your comments are always welcome. Send them to me at Legashira@yahoo.com. They will be compiled and presented to the Board of Directors and shared with you, our members and readers, as appropriate.

Thank you for your support of DignityUSA and its work, as well as your interest in our publications.



DignityUSA Adopts More Inclusive Mission Statement

By Mark Matson, DignityUSA President.

At the October 2009 DignityUSA Board Meeting held in Minneapolis, the DignityUSA Board of Directors unanimously adopted a reworded Mission Statement that is more inclusive, more reflective of reality, and more forward-thinking than the former Mission Statement.



Mark Matson

If you recall in my San Francisco Convention address of July 2009, I stated, “We will not get to the Promised Land of a fully inclusive Church by doing what had brought us safe thus far. The Spirit is not a creature of habit. We must change our way of thinking.”

The former Mission Statement read: *DignityUSA works for respect and justice for all gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy and support.*

The newly adopted Mission Statement reads (with added language underscored): *DignityUSA works for respect and justice for people of all sexual orientations, genders, and gender identities—especially gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons—in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy, and support.*

There are four reasons for our Mission Statement change:

1. Changing attitudes among Catholics. A March 2008 Pew Research study showed that one-third of adults who were raised Catholic have left the Church. In addition, numerous surveys demonstrate that American Catholics increasingly disagree with official Church teaching on many issues including who should be ordained, the status of the divorced and remarried, use of birth control, and the sinfulness of homosexuality. As bonds with the institutional Church weaken and Catholics feel freer to believe differently from what they have been taught, increasing numbers believe that homosexuality is an innate part of an individual’s makeup, that lesbian and gay people can have committed, positive relationships, and that LGBT people should have some measure of civil equality. As of 2006, a majority of Catholics even supported civil unions or marriage for same-gender couples. Increasing numbers of gay people find welcome, support and affirmation in their local parishes, or in nearby welcoming congregations.

Therefore, Dignity’s identity as an opponent of institutional Church teaching must be reframed or de-emphasized. Focus should shift to providing affirming community and modeling Gospel-based service, as well as to welcoming non-gay allies seeking authentic Catholic community. This increases our visibility outside the GLBT Catholic community while enriching our own experience of Church through increased diversity of experiences. If we want to attract new people, we must change

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The *DATELINE* is distributed to persons on the Dignity News-List-Serve in electronic format ONLY. Sign up at <http://visitor.constantcontact.com/email.jsp?m=1102083583987>. You may also contact a local chapter to see if it will provide monthly hardcopies.

Begun in 1969 in San Diego, CA under the leadership of Fr. Patrick Nidorf, OSA, first as a counseling group and then a support group in Los Angeles, DignityUSA has been a national organization since 1973 uniting GLBT Catholics, their families and friends.

DignityUSA is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose national office is located in the Greater Boston area, with chapters located throughout the United States.

Members gather at local chapters, periodic regional meetings and biennial national conventions.

The **QV** encourages the exchange of opinions, book reviews, reflections, background information, resource materials and essays and articles by established speakers and professionals touching on spirituality, human sexuality and its expression, and the mission of DignityUSA. Of special interest are personal experiences and what has worked well in areas of pastoral ministry, human and social justice issues, leadership, chapter and faith community building.

Opinions expressed in reflections, reviews, letters, etc., are those of their authors and not necessarily those of DignityUSA.

our conversation from a negative one of complaint and grievance to a positive one of hope and inspiration.

2. Reverse the trend of declining membership by “enlarging the tent.” (One of DignityUSA’s identified Strategic Goals). DignityUSA’s talent and financial resources have come principally through local chapters. We must reverse the decline of “members” who are the ultimate source of those resources. This will require Dignity at both the national and local levels to let go of the “tried and true” strategies for building membership and embracing new ones. These will include understanding and serving the spiritual needs of our under-served populations: women, youth, minorities, and straight allies who are also searching for an inclusive Church and society.

We have been studying chapter dynamics. Not all are shrinking. Chapters that are growing have been working hard to

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understand and respond to the spiritual needs of women, married clergy, and straight allies. Many straight women and couples are coming to these Dignity chapters because they find there an inclusive Church. But they state they feel more like interlopers because we have been a “GLBT” organization only.

3. Dignity has acquired a core competency in addressing a key issue for a large number of lay Catholics: sexuality. The largest gap between the laity and the hierarchy is around sexual theology. While DignityUSA has focused on homosexuality, we believe we are better suited to address human sexuality than any other reform group. Our positions on homosexuality can easily be expanded to include heterosexual issues, particularly those of a group who are being excluded on the basis of their sexuality: women. This will broaden the appeal of Dignity.

4. It is the right thing to do. I wish to draw your attention to two key tenets of DignityUSA’s Statement of Position and Purpose (SPP).

SOCIAL JUSTICE: *As Catholics and members of society, we involve ourselves in those actions that bring the love of Christ to others and provide the basis of social reform in the Church and society. We are actively involved with: Individuals, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Groups, Religious and Secular Groups, Health Care, Women’s Justice Issues.*

EQUALITY ISSUES: *We dedicate ourselves to develop the potential of all persons to become more fully human. To do this, we work toward the eradication of all constraints on our personhood based on the ascribed social roles of women and men and to promote inclusivity in all areas of liturgical and community life.*

The great Italian poet Dante said, “The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in times of moral crisis remain neutral.” Dignity cannot remain true to its SPP and remain silent on issues of great concern to the women of our Church: full inclusion in all the sacraments of the Church. Today, this is increasingly being realized through the “valid but illicit” ordination of women as priests. As I write this, communities of women religious are under investigation by Rome. They largely perceive this as hostile.

The repression of the feminine (misogyny) is a key source of this theological dysfunction. It is at the core of the shaming of homosexuality and the exclusion of women from ordination. Women have been our allies in the last 40 years as we have fought for our full inclusion. They need our support and welcome now. DignityUSA suffers from what the Church does—under-representation of the feminine perspective. We are 80% male. We all recognize the problem. We all lament the lack of women, but we keep doing the same things. It is past time to do something different.

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In summary, we have broadened our mission to include people of all sexual orientations and gender identities:

1. Welcoming non-gay allies who seek authentic Catholic community increases our visibility outside the GLBT Catholic community. This is our most effective strategy for **changing minds and increasing support** outside the GLBT community. At the same time we will enrich our own experience of church by increasing the diversity of experiences and perspectives.
2. The best opportunity to **reverse the trend of declining membership** is to understand and serve the spiritual needs of our under-served populations: women, youth, minorities, and straight allies who are also searching for an inclusive church and society.
3. Dignity has developed a core competency in **challenging and reframing the Church's theology of sexuality**. This has been shaped by our GLBT experience but can easily be broadened to address broader issues of concern to heterosexuals. We are the best reform group to take up this challenge.
4. It is the **right thing to do**, consistent with our Statement of Position and Purpose and long-held stands on social justice and full inclusion of women.

Your National Board of Directors is steering Dignity through challenging times. Not only must we involve and support the core of our organization—you, the membership—but we must increasingly involve and support reform-minded allies among Catholics hungry for an authentic church.

**DignityUSA: Roman Catholic?
 LGBT-focused?**

By Daniel Helminiak

DignityUSA is probably stronger than ever. The superb work of a paid staff and talented Board has given Dignity the stability, efficiency, and competence to be a powerful voice for change. Yet one uncertainty continues to becloud the organization: there is no consensus on what its work should be. Thus, Dignity's impact is scattered, fragmented, and diluted.



Daniel Helminiak

Dignity's Statement of Position and Purpose speaks of "reform in the Church" and, specifically, "for the development of sexual theology...and for the acceptance of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered peoples as full and equal members of the one Christ." How much this "reform" has drifted from focus on sexual ethics is unclear. What is clear is Dignity's increasing concern for all-out transformation of the Roman Catholic Church.

Emphasis on such pervasive ecclesial reform dominated our convention in July 2009. Dr. Mary Hunt's overview of Dignity's

history, status, and prospects provided a quotable line to make the point: "Let the needs of the world be our agenda, not the failings of the institutional church." Our national president, Mark Matson, repeated that line and added others like it: we are to be "the church for all who seek full inclusion" and "we must be the change we want to see in the church."

Couched in terms as sweeping as "the needs of the world," the identity of DignityUSA remains uncertain. Despite the upbeat mood of the San Francisco convention, indicators of alienation and fragmentation were also palpable. The multiple constituencies of Dignity have never been easy to manage: chapters appealing only to local affiliation, individuals struggling with coming out or seeking spiritual guidance, people wanting an LGBT-focused Mass, activists committed to challenging Vatican teaching, families of LGBT people needing support, fully out youth claiming a bona fide Catholic identity or else disassociating from the Catholic Church, other national organizations partnering with Dignity, the church and society at large needing an alternative Catholic voice on LGBT issues. One would think that these shifting challenges would be enough to burden any one organization, but now Dignity seems committed to reformation of the Catholic Church itself—and I use the historically loaded word reformation deliberately.

I fear this current emphasis compromises Dignity's original, important, and already overwhelming mission, which becomes increasingly demanding under Benedict XVI's administration. Two questions express my concern: Is reform of the whole church the task of Dignity? And is Dignity still Roman Catholic? My personal answer to both is a firm No. This state of affairs is gravely problematic.

Both those questions hang together, and the same issues tend to provoke them. Paramount among them is feminist theology. As a gender issue, it is surely pertinent to Dignity; misogyny and homophobia do walk hand in hand. Dignity's Statement of Position and Purpose does include concern "to eradicate sexism and particularly in all areas of Church and secular life so that women are wholly included, accepted, and welcome" and "to promote inclusivity in all areas of liturgical and community life." So Dignity has always struggled to do right by women without betraying the focal concerns of the organization. Perhaps it is indeed impossible to change the Roman Catholic Church without confronting head on the kyriarchy that controls it. Yet when does dismantling the kyriarchy and restructuring the whole church distract from Dignity's LGBT mission? There is no obvious answer; it is always a judgment call. I believe Dignity has already crossed the line.

No one, for example, could have credited the convention's main Eucharistic Liturgy as a Roman Catholic Mass. Was there even a validly and licitly ordained priest presiding at that liturgy? If so, the fact was nowhere determinable. Worse still, the lack of concern over this question was explicit. As Mary Hunt reported without apparent concern or opposition, "Many of us have moved beyond dependence on the presence of an ordained cleric,

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male or female, to authenticate our masses”—although the tradition of apostolic succession and ordination is the backbone of Roman Catholicism. (I say tradition, not fact: we know the inconsistencies in this matter in the earliest Christian century.)

Please, get my real point. My theology is as liberal as they come. I do not fault efforts at all-out reform in themselves, but they are out of place in Dignity. Surely, Jesus was really present in that convention Eucharist. Surely, he is really present in non-Catholic gatherings. So the “genuineness” of that Eucharistic experience is not what is in question. Its Roman Catholic nature is.

Vatican II is explicit: one need not be Catholic, nor Christian, nor even theist to be saved, but only a person of sincere good will. Moreover, the Council insisted that Christ is present in the Word, in the priest, and in the congregation as well as in the sacrament on the altar. Christ is hardly “more really present” in one form than another. What could that possibly mean? Indeed, through the Holy Spirit, Christ is present and active in myriad ways also in everyday life. However, Christ’s presence can be symbolized differently, and the various Christian churches have their own ways of celebrating Christ’s presence. What occurred at our 40th-anniversary convention was not a Roman Catholic form of celebrating Eucharist. This failure is what concerns me—in an organization dedicated to influencing Roman Catholic teaching.

Again, Mary Hunt squarely addressed the matter at stake: “There are a range of ways of being Catholic of which ‘Roman’ is but one....the Roman part of the Catholic tradition is not necessarily the normative one and need not be treated as such.” Absolutely! But not in the case of Roman Catholics! This, only this, is my point. Acceptance of the Roman Catholic “style”—the technical term is “church order”—is precisely what distinguishes Roman Catholicism from other Christian traditions.

DignityUSA is on a path of exit from the Roman Catholic Church. Exit itself is not my concern. Many have left, legitimately and deservedly, and they are the better for it. But rightly, they no longer call themselves Roman Catholic. To part ways with the official church and form one more to one’s liking—and even, I fully agree, more in accord with the best of theology—is quintessentially Protestant, and this is what DignityUSA is currently about. People can argue ecclesiology as they wish, but theological correctness does not determine ecclesial affiliation. It’s more a matter of politics than theology, and calling it ecclesiology does not change its essentially sociological, business-administrative, or political character. From this perspective, changing churches is like changing parties. All may be American, but Democrats are not Republicans, and the two are American in their own ways.

To put the matter bluntly: if people don’t like the way the Roman Catholic Church is currently running, they can leave and join another religion that better meets their spiritual needs. Indeed, already gone so far, why even be concerned whether or

not it’s “Catholic” in any form or Christian? Why not Buddhist, Muslim, or Hindu? Even enshrined Catholic teaching allows that all can be saved.

Mark Matson asserts, “If we ARE the Church, then we don’t have to sit back and wait for the kyriarchs to make the decisions.” True, we are the Church, but so are other believers, including the bishops, and none of us are free to decide for ourselves what the whole of the Church is to be. Are members of Dignity serving, perhaps, only selfish interests by morphing the organization into another church because of dissatisfaction with the current one? Is Dignity re-enacting the Reformation?

Please again, let my point be clear. In decrying reformation, I am not even faulting Martin Luther. He was right in much of his objection to the Roman Church of his day, yet even he lamented the political consequences. Likewise, we are right in much of our objection to the Vatican church of our day.

Indeed, on sexual ethics the Vatican flouts long-standing, solemnly proclaimed—if not, perhaps, actually infallibly defined—Catholic teaching from the First Vatican Council: “Although it is true that faith is above reason, no true conflict between faith and reason could ever occur.” This teaching is what keeps me Roman Catholic: the only theological tradition I know that could coherently and respectfully address the needs of a multi-religious, global society—if only it would be true to its heritage. But no! The defensive Vatican “of little faith” (Mt. 14:31, 16:8) flagrantly dismisses overwhelming evidence on every front—biblical, historical, psychological, medical, anthropological, personal—in its crusade against same-sex relationships. Likewise, the Vatican ignores its own teaching on collegiality, subsidiarity, and the rights of the baptized.

Nonetheless, to object to Vatican practice on the basis of solid Roman Catholic teaching and, thus, to offer LGBT people, their families, and society at large an alternative Roman Catholic vision is not to set up one’s own church. Yet Dignity appears to be doing so—and, in the process, neglecting its founding mission.

The issues that pushed Dignity over the line are real, they are serious, they are legitimate. In no way do I minimize them. But is it Dignity’s role to take on the lot and at the expense of the one task that is its alone?

In fact, there do exist many ways to meet the spiritual needs of LGBT people within the confines of the present Catholic system. There also exist many ways to celebrate powerfully meaningful, gender-inclusive liturgies within the present Catholic system. There exist, as well, many Catholic organizations, which Dignity members could and do join, and many partnerships, which Dignity already prizes, that provide venues for Dignity members to advance the many-faceted reformation of the Roman Catholic Church.

No one organization can address all the needs of the Church, however urgent, deserving, and inspiring they might be. Yet Dignity is attempting this impossibility. In fact, other lay

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organizations already specifically address, one by one, the array of institutionalized flaws in the church. The need for reformation of the Roman Catholic Church is not being ignored in the least. There is no reason under the sun for Dignity to make this overarching task its own. On the other hand, not one of those organizations spotlights the skewed sexual ethics of the Vatican. Not one has proclaimed direct challenges to Vatican teaching on this matter. In this matter Dignity is singular. Indeed, it is the organization to which the others look to “cover” this matter. Yet Dignity is choosing to invest its efforts in structuring for its members a comfortable but non-Roman-Catholic church experience and necessarily, then, short-changing the one mission that is uniquely its own.

Only a truly Roman Catholic organization can challenge the Vatican on sexual ethics, and only an organization actually focused on sexual ethics can mount an effective challenge. Dignity appears to meet these requirements less and less. So I pose again my two questions for consideration, and I add a third: Is the wholesale reform of the church actually Dignity’s task? Is Dignity still Roman Catholic? And isn’t the LGBT issue worth all-consuming dedication?

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A Manifesto! The Time Has Come!

By Bishop John Shelby Spong

October 15, 2009

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Website: www.johnshelbyspong.com/



Bishop John Spong

I have made a decision. I will no longer debate the issue of homosexuality in the church with anyone. I will no longer engage the biblical ignorance that emanates from so many right-wing Christians about how the Bible condemns homosexuality, as if that point of view still has any credibility. I will no longer discuss with them or listen to them tell me how homosexuality is “an abomination to God,” about how homosexuality is a “chosen lifestyle,” or about how through prayer and “spiritual counseling” homosexual persons can be “cured.” Those arguments are no longer worthy of my time or energy. I will no longer dignify by listening to the thoughts of those who advocate “reparative therapy,” as if homosexual persons are somehow broken and need to be repaired. I will no longer talk to those who believe that the unity of the church can or should be achieved by rejecting the presence of, or at least at the expense of, gay and lesbian people. I will no longer take the time to refute the unlearned and undocumentable claims of certain world religious leaders who call homosexuality “deviant.” I will no longer listen to that pious sentimentality that certain Christian leaders continue to employ, which suggests some version of that strange and overtly dishonest phrase that “we love the sinner but hate the sin.” That statement is, I have concluded, nothing more than a self-serving lie designed to cover the fact that these people hate homosexual persons and fear homosexuality itself, but somehow know that hatred is incompatible with the Christ they claim to profess, so they adopt this face-saving and absolutely false statement. I will no longer temper my understanding of truth in order to pretend that I have even a tiny smidgen of respect for the appalling negativity that continues to emanate from religious circles where the church has for centuries conveniently perfumed its ongoing prejudices against blacks, Jews, women and homosexual persons with what it assumes is “high-sounding, pious rhetoric.” The day for that mentality has quite simply come to an end for me. I will personally neither tolerate it nor listen to it any longer. The world has moved on, leaving these elements of the Christian Church that cannot adjust to new knowledge or a new consciousness lost in a sea of their own irrelevance. They no longer talk to anyone but themselves. I will no longer seek to slow down the witness to inclusiveness by pretending that there is some middle ground between prejudice and oppression. There isn’t. Justice postponed is justice denied. That can be a resting place no longer for anyone. An old civil rights song proclaimed that the only choice awaiting those who cannot adjust to a new understanding was to “Roll on over or we’ll roll on over you!” Time waits for no one.

I will particularly ignore those members of my own Episcopal Church who seek to break away from this body to

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form a “new church,” claiming that this new and bigoted instrument alone now represents the Anglican Communion. Such a new ecclesiastical body is designed to allow these pathetic human beings, who are so deeply locked into a world that no longer exists, to form a community in which they can continue to hate gay people, distort gay people with their hopeless rhetoric and to be part of a religious fellowship in which they can continue to feel justified in their homophobic prejudices for the rest of their tortured lives. Church unity can never be a virtue that is preserved by allowing injustice, oppression and psychological tyranny to go unchallenged.

In my personal life, I will no longer listen to televised debates conducted by “fair-minded” channels that seek to give “both sides” of this issue “equal time.” I am aware that these stations no longer give equal time to the advocates of treating women as if they are the property of men or to the advocates of reinstating either segregation or slavery, despite the fact that when these evil institutions were coming to an end the Bible was still being quoted frequently on each of these subjects. It is time for the media to announce that there are no longer two sides to the issue of full humanity for gay and lesbian people. There is no way that justice for homosexual people can be compromised any longer.

I will no longer act as if the Papal office is to be respected if the present occupant of that office is either not willing or not able to inform and educate himself on public issues on which he dares to speak with embarrassing ineptitude. I will no longer be respectful of the leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who seems to believe that rude behavior, intolerance and even killing prejudice is somehow acceptable, so long as it comes from third-world religious leaders, who more than anything else reveal in themselves the price that colonial oppression has required of the minds and hearts of so many of our world’s population. I see no way that ignorance and truth can be placed side by side, nor do I believe that evil is somehow less evil if the Bible is quoted to justify it. I will dismiss as unworthy of any more of my attention the wild, false and uninformed opinions of such would-be religious leaders as Pat Robertson, James Dobson, Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, Albert Mohler, and Robert Duncan. My country and my church have both already spent too much time, energy and money trying to accommodate these backward points of view when they are no longer even tolerable.

I make these statements because it is time to move on. The battle is over. The victory has been won. There is no reasonable doubt as to what the final outcome of this struggle will be. Homosexual people will be accepted as equal, full human beings, who have a legitimate claim on every right that both church and society have to offer any of us. Homosexual marriages will become legal, recognized by the state and pronounced holy by the church. “Don’t ask, don’t tell” will be dismantled as the policy of our armed forces. We will and we must learn that equality of citizenship is not something that should ever be submitted to a referendum. Equality under and before the law is a solemn promise conveyed to all our citizens

in the Constitution itself. Can any of us imagine having a public referendum on whether slavery should continue, whether segregation should be dismantled, whether voting privileges should be offered to women? The time has come for politicians to stop hiding behind unjust laws that they themselves helped to enact, and to abandon that convenient shield of demanding a vote on the rights of full citizenship because they do not understand the difference between a constitutional democracy, which this nation has, and a “mobocracy,” which this nation rejected when it adopted its constitution. We do not put the civil rights of a minority to the vote of a plebiscite.

I will also no longer act as if I need a majority vote of some ecclesiastical body in order to bless, ordain, recognize and celebrate the lives and gifts of gay and lesbian people in the life of the church. No one should ever again be forced to submit the privilege of citizenship in this nation or membership in the Christian Church to the will of a majority vote.

The battle in both our culture and our church to rid our souls of this dying prejudice is finished. A new consciousness has arisen. A decision has quite clearly been made. Inequality for gay and lesbian people is no longer a debatable issue in either church or state. Therefore, I will from this moment on refuse to dignify the continued public expression of ignorant prejudice by engaging it. I do not tolerate racism or sexism any longer. From this moment on, I will no longer tolerate our culture’s various forms of homophobia. I do not care who it is who articulates these attitudes or who tries to make them sound holy with religious jargon.

I have been part of this debate for years, but things do get settled and this issue is now settled for me. I do not debate any longer with members of the “Flat Earth Society” either. I do not debate with people who think we should treat epilepsy by casting demons out of the epileptic person; I do not waste time engaging those medical opinions that suggest that bleeding the patient might release the infection. I do not converse with people who think that Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans as punishment for the sin of being the birthplace of Ellen DeGeneres or that the terrorists hit the United States on 9/11 because we tolerated homosexual people, abortions, feminism or the American Civil Liberties Union. I am tired of being embarrassed by so much of my church’s participation in causes that are quite unworthy of the Christ I serve or the God whose mystery and wonder I appreciate more each day. Indeed I feel the Christian Church should not only apologize, but do public penance for the way we have treated people of color, women, adherents of other religions and those we designated heretics, as well as gay and lesbian people.

Life moves on. As the poet James Russell Lowell once put it more than a century ago: “New occasions teach new duties, Time makes ancient good uncouth.” I am ready now to claim the victory. I will from now on assume it and live into it. I am unwilling to argue about it or to discuss it as if there are two equally valid, competing positions any longer. The day for that mentality has simply gone forever.

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This is my manifesto and my creed. I proclaim it today. I invite others to join me in this public declaration. I believe that such a public outpouring will help cleanse both the church and this nation of its own distorting past. It will restore integrity and honor to both church and state. It will signal that a new day has dawned and we are ready not just to embrace it, but also to rejoice in it and to celebrate it.

Bishop John Shelby Spong is retired Episcopal Bishop of Newark, New Jersey. Bishop Spong was a keynote speaker and workshop presenter at DignityUSA's Convention 2007 at Austin, Texas. He is the author of numerous books including *Liberating the Gospels: Reading the Bible with Jewish Eyes* and *Jesus for the Non-Religious*. He maintains a website "Bishop John Selby Spong — A New Christianity for a New World" at <http://www.johnshelbyspong.com/> where you can sign up for a newsletter *Free Weekly Q&A From Bishop Spong*.

The "Underground Church"

By Michael Bayly

February 11, 2009

Reprinted with permission from:

<http://thewildreed.blogspot.com/2008/02/underground-church.html>

I'm a member of a Catholic parish in the Twin Cities that, along with a number of other "progressive" Catholic communities, has recently been ordered by the Archdiocese to conform its liturgical practices to the rubrics as stated in the General Instruction on the Roman Missal.

I'm sure that for many Catholic parishes, the rubrics of the Roman Missal serve well to express and reflect their faith and community life. Yet for the past 30 years, the parish to which I feel blessed to belong has developed its liturgy in ways that beautifully reflect the presence of the Spirit discerned in the unique gifts and needs of its members and in our shared lives together. This development has been a very intentional and faith-filled embodiment of Vatican II's call for the "full and active participation" of the laity in "liturgical celebrations" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), 1963). Yet many feel that now, in one fell swoop, this embodiment — along with the Spirit that nurtured and inspired it — has been discounted by the Archdiocese in its demand that it be abandoned for the rubrics of the Roman Missal. It seems that in this situation, the "form," which Jesus said "profits nothing," has been elevated above the "Spirit" which gives life.

According to Catholic theologian and author Richard McBrien, those ultimately responsible for demanding this type of Spirit-denying conformity comprise "a small but powerful and determined group within the Vatican who have never

accepted the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council and Pope Paul VI."

The resistance of this "small but powerful" clique to these reforms (and to subsequent Spirit-led innovations within Catholic parishes and communities from the Netherlands to South Minneapolis) is, insists McBrien, "at root ecclesiological in nature." What they oppose is the "de-clericalization of the liturgy" and Vatican II's call for the "full and active participation" of the laity.

In the minds of those resistant to such "full and active participation," writes McBrien, "the Church is identical with the hierarchy and the priests who serve under the bishops. The laity, on the other hand, are simply the beneficiaries of the sacramental ministrations of the clergy, in a process ultimately controlled by the Vatican. The problem for the resisters is not so much that the Mass was put into the vernacular, but that the laity could now fully understand it and actively participate in it.... It is [the] underlying ecclesiology [of Vatican II] that is rejected, and not simply the changes in language and rituals. What the resisters oppose is the very idea that the Church is the whole People of God, laity included, rather than the hierarchy and clergy alone."

Inclusive welcoming, participatory liturgies, and democratic governance

The recent efforts of the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis to enforce strict liturgical conformity, along with its efforts to promote the pseudo-science of NARTH [National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality], forbid dialogue, and ban certain speakers, have left many experiencing feelings of deep frustration, sadness, loss, and anger. Such responses, coupled with McBrien's observations regarding the rejection by many in the Catholic hierarchy of Vatican II ecclesiology, bring to mind Kathleen Kautzer's comprehensive study of the "underground church" movement, and specifically this movement's efforts to move beyond the institutional structures of Rome so as to create and sustain Catholic communities of vibrancy and authenticity.

Kautzer is an associate professor of sociology at Regis College, a predominately all-women's Catholic college founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph in Weston, MA. She teaches courses in peace studies, women's and children's issues, social movements, and spirituality. For the past four years, Kautzer has traveled the country studying the Catholic reform movement and, in particular, the emergence and growth of Eucharistic communities and parishes that operate outside Vatican control. Her study, soon to be released as a book entitled *The Underground Church*, drew on theories of nonviolence and social movements to interpret and evaluate the Catholic reform movement.

Last November [2007], Kautzer spoke at the annual Call To Action conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. As part of her presentation, entitled "The Underground Church: Nonviolent Alternatives to Vatican Empire," Kautzer shared photos and descriptions of "Vatican II-styled communities marked by

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inclusive welcoming, participatory liturgies, and democratic governance.” She noted that “some are within, others outside the institutional structures of the Roman Catholic Church.” Many of the Catholics that comprise these “resistance communities” no longer find dialogue with the hierarchy constructive. Accordingly, they are proactively creating, discovering, and employing “a range of nonviolent strategies to preserve or create vibrant communities that fit their vision of a just Church.”

Kautzer defines the “underground church” as the movement to reform the Church structurally. The term encompasses a range of Vatican II-styled parishes and reform groups, from Voice of the Faithful to Call To Action.

Generally, all such parishes and groups are working for four basic reforms:

- 1) A formal role for laity in decision-making.
- 2) Fiscal transparency and accountability (an important issue, says Kautzer, given that a recent study found 85% of the dioceses looked into had serious problems of embezzlement).
- 3) An inclusive priesthood — one welcoming of married clergy, women, and gays.
- 4) A commitment to renewing and expanding the direction of Vatican II.

Kautzer chose the term “underground church” in part because it parallels Elisie Boulding’s concept of the “underside of history,” which Kautzer explains is the idea that “in any society, even if the dominant culture is oppressive and hierarchical, there is always an underside where people try and practice cooperation and nonviolence.”

Although the scope of Kautzer’s four-year study was limited to the U.S., she notes that there are similar “underground church” movements underway and flourishing in other parts of the world. Perhaps the most well known of these is represented by the liturgical reforms being carried out by the Dutch Dominicans.

“Above-ground communities”

Kautzer organized the communities she studied according to the different forms of non-violent resistance they embody. Many Vatican II-styled parishes, for instance, along with the reform group Voice of the Faithful, comprise the “lightest form” of non-violent resistance. These “above-ground communities” often employ the “insider tactics” of “protest and persuasion.” They attempt to work “within the system” and, in the case of Voice of the Faithful, avoid “controversial” issues such as female ordination.

“Borderline communities”

“Borderline communities,” says Kautzer, are those engaged in “a little stronger form of non-violent resistance” than the “above-ground communities.” They sometimes engage in the

“insider tactics” of protest and persuasion, but more often than not engage in the “outsider tactic” of non-cooperation. Some examples of borderline communities include:

- 1) Convents in which Catholic nuns perform their own liturgies (including Eucharist) and new types of rituals.
- 2) Eucharistic communities that are at least tolerated by the hierarchy and rely on “insider priests” (i.e., priests recognized by the Vatican) but engage in church reform work.
- 3) Vigiling Parishes that are resisting closure orders and conducting their own rituals (e.g., St. James the Great in Wellesley, MA, which is part of the Council of Vigiling Parishes).

The “underground church”

The “underground church” is defined as groups, parishes, or networks of parishes that operate outside of Vatican approval or control, and work for church reform. They tend to employ the “outsider tactics” of non-violent intervention and the creation of parallel institutions. Examples of the underground church include:

- 1) Catholic reform organizations such as CORPUS, Women’s Ordination Conference, Roman Catholic Women-priests, Catholics for a Free Choice, and Dignity, which, unlike the others, says Kautzer, “has no choice but to operate as an underground church because of the Church’s punitive policies towards homosexuals.” (In most dioceses, including the Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis, Dignity is banned from meeting on church property.)
- 2) Eucharistic communities that are not approved by the Vatican, rely primarily on lay persons or “outsider” priests (i.e., priests who have married, resigned, or been defrocked), and engage in church reform work. For example: Community of God’s Love in Lowell, MA.

3) Parishes that are not recognized by the Vatican, but retain the “Catholic” label and engage in church reform work. For example: Spiritus Christi in Rochester, NY, and St. Stanislaus Kostka in St. Louis, MO.

4) Communion and/or networks of parishes that are non-Roman yet identify and are recognized as Catholic, and provide governance structure and support services for “underground” parishes. For example: the Old Catholic Church (for an extensive interview with Rev. Robert Caruso of Cornerstone Old Catholic Church in St. Paul, MN, see <http://thewildreed.blogspot.com/2007/09/old-catholic-church-catholicism-beyond.html>), the Reformed Catholic Church, the National Catholic Church, and the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. This last group has developed a constitution based on the Association of the Rights of Catholics in the Church. Among other things, this constitution expresses welcome to all “regardless of race, national origin, religious affiliation, gender, or sexual orientation,” and mandates that people within parishes vote on policy and elect their priests.

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Disadvantages and advantages

Kautzer acknowledges that the underground church communities are labeled “schismatic” by the Vatican. Others dismiss the movement as being like a modern-day Protestant Reformation. “It is in a way,” says Kautzer, “but the difference is that people aren’t creating new denominations. They’re saying, We are Catholic, but we’re just going to do it without Vatican approval.”

There are, of course, some potential pitfalls — including the ongoing struggle for funding and membership, and the potential for cult-like and/or unqualified leadership. However, it’s not as if qualified leadership is guaranteed by reliance on the Vatican, notes Kautzer. In addition, the Vatican itself encourages cult-like organizations, for example, Opus Dei. Many of these organizations, says Kautzer, are documented in Gordon Urquhart’s book, *The Pope’s Armada: Unlocking the Secrets of Mysterious and Powerful New Sects in the Church*.

Advantages of the underground church include not being restricted by Vatican pronouncements — many of which reflect a narrow and impoverished theology, especially around issues of gender and sexuality. As a result, the underground church, says Kautzer, “challenges dualistic categories that separate laity/clergy, men/women, celibate/married, the sacred and the profane, thereby embodying the notion of the priesthood of all believers and the sacred dimension of reality.”

Impediments to reform

As to why so many Church hierarchs are resistant to the type of change heralded by the underground church, Kautzer suggests that one factor is that many of them, especially those within the Vatican, “tend to be isolated and surrounded primarily by like-minded colleagues selected precisely because of their conformity and subservience.”

Drawing on the theories of human consciousness development pioneered by Ken Wilber, Kautzer notes that the current pope, like his predecessor, operates primarily from a “traditionalist philosophical framework” — one that is highly authoritarian and dismissive of alternative perspectives and views. Most Catholics, Kautzer contends, operate from a “post-modern or even integralist framework” worldview. In terms of Wilber’s model of human consciousness development, these are two stages beyond where the vast majority of Vatican officials are. “This gap in worldviews,” says Kautzer, “makes it difficult for people to communicate.”

Kautzer also draws on the insights of psychotherapist Mary Gail Frawley-O’Dea, author of *Perversion of Power: Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church*, when she describes many Catholic hierarchs as “narcissistic,” a state that Frawley-O’Dea maintains is “reinforced by the highly deferential treatment of unchecked power.”

In light of all of this, Kautzer, paraphrasing Gandhi, insists that: “We must be the change we want to see in the Church.” “If

‘We are the Church’,” she says, “then we don’t have to sit back and wait for the hierarchs to make decisions.”

Status and prospects of reform

The hierarchs, however, are making decisions — ones that many Catholics find, at the very least, problematic, and, at most, intolerable. It’s too early to say how my Catholic community or others within the Archdiocese of St.Paul/Minneapolis will respond to the latest demands to conform. My sense is that the “insider tactics” that many have embraced for years are rapidly losing their appeal.

Perhaps the abandoning of such tactics is long overdue. After all, during her talk at the 2007 National Call To Action Conference, Kautzer could give “no substantive examples” of successful insider strategies (i.e., of people working, protesting, and attempting to persuade authority figures within the system) bringing about reform. For substantive change to occur, she declared, outsider strategies must be employed.

“There’s a lot of exciting stuff going on in the underground church,” said Kautzer. But within reform groups focused on insider reform, great difficulties and obstacles — including financial — are being encountered. Voice of the Faithful, for instance, is experiencing a “funding crisis.” People seem to be giving up on insider reform, she said, and are “tired of having the iron thumb of the hierarchy on their back and saying that you can’t talk about this, or think that, or do this.”

“The prospects for reform are dim if we rely solely on insider tactics,” said Kautzer. This is especially true given that the new priests coming into the priesthood tend to be very conservative and authoritative; that Vatican II priests, bishops, and cardinals are either “dying off or being forced out”; and that Pope Benedict XVI has stated publicly that he wants a smaller, purer Church, and that he wants reformers to leave unless they can support everything the hierarchy teaches. “[The pope] doesn’t care if you leave,” says Kautzer. “He’s happy to push you out the door.”

This isn’t true, however, of all cardinals and bishops, many of whom are not as isolated as the pope. They are acutely aware of what such an exodus would mean financially for the Church. Even some conservative Catholics are worried. Writing in the February 2008 issue of the Catholic World Report, Russell Shaw refers to David Carlin’s book, *The Decline and Fall of the Catholic Church in America*, and notes that: “Carlin concludes that the outcome of the crisis will probably be the de facto collapse of the Church in America and the retreat of Catholics into the status of a ‘minor and relatively insignificant sect.’ Traditionalists will have won the internal Catholic power struggle, mainly because the progressives will have drifted away. But in the end, the small band of traditionalists will find themselves isolated in ‘a new Catholic quasi-ghetto,’ with about as much influence on the culture as the Amish and Hasidic Jews have now.”

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Movement of the spirit

I'm not interested in living in any type of ghetto, yet that's what Pope Benedict XVI seems intent on creating for Catholics. I'm drawn to a Church open to the Spirit, a Church that recognizes and celebrates itself as the Risen Body of Christ, alive and afoot in the world; a Church unafraid of journeying and engagement, of growth and change. My sense is that the birthing and rising of the "underground church," as described and documented by Kathleen Kautzer, is the movement of the Spirit, seeking and finding welcoming and fertile soil beyond the fortress-like walls of the Vatican's current state of rigidity and its fearful retreat into conformity.

I cannot help but think that Kautzer's study validates Rosemary Radford Ruether's observation that the more the hierarchy stagnates and retreats, the more numerous and freewheeling the creative initiatives that spring up on the ground.

I do not believe that such initiatives herald the destruction of the Church or its collapse into insignificance. Rather, I believe that the initiatives that comprise the "underground church" are, in fact, the hope of the Church, and herald its transformation into the fullness of new life.

Michael Bayly is an editor of *The Progressive Catholic Voice* and the executive coordinator of the Catholic Pastoral Committee on Sexual Minorities (CPCSM). This article was first published on Michael's blog, *The Wild Reed* <http://thewildreed.blogspot.com/>

Erotic Encounter With the Divine

By Eric L. Hays-Strom with permission.
 First published on Jesus in Love Blog
<http://jesusinlove.blogspot.com> October 21, 2009.

I never thought about the relationship between sexuality and spirituality until several years ago. If the two words came up in conjunction with each other at all, my first thought, indeed my only thought, was that they were totally unrelated.

That all began to change in January 2000 when three of us set off on a road trip to southern California. Scott and I and our dearest friend, Karla, were on our way to a meeting in Palm Springs. While there, we took the opportunity to visit the headquarters of our denomination, the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches.

While perusing the resources available there, we discovered a tape series about spirituality and sexuality, "The Erotic Contemplative" by Michael Bernard Kelly. I was immediately intrigued. On our two-day drive home from Los Angeles to



Eric & Scott
 Hays-Strom

Omaha, we started listening to the tapes and discussing the questions that came in a guide with the tapes. It was probably amongst the most intimate conversations of sex, sexuality, and spirituality I have ever had. At one point I recall going into extreme detail in answer to a question from Karla, "Just what is it two gay men do when they have sex?" Oral sex was obvious to her, but what else if anything? And so I told her!

The tapes, and that discussion, were for me the beginning of a quest to incorporate my sexuality and my spirituality. Though in truth, I now know they've always been intertwined. My quest became to understand that relationship. I'm still a long way from finishing that quest.

The quest opened me to new experiences of the sacred, both in regards to spirituality and exploration of my sexuality and sexual expression. My first realization was that within the bounds of love, nothing sexual could be taboo as long as both parties consent to the experience, and no other parties are hurt. If I want to explore something untried, if Scott is okay with it, we do it. Some things we decide just are not for us. Others are. This freedom of sexual experience is only to be found within the confines of our relationship. We remain faithful to each other. Though, we have from time to time discussed the option of including another in our lovemaking.

Through the years our lovemaking has risen to an entirely new level when we intentionally invite God to be present to and with us. That is, when we prayerfully invite God's Divine Presence to bless our lovemaking and to join with us in our lovemaking.

In my blog (<http://scottneric.com/ontheroad>) I have written about several experiences in my life in which I have known God's presence, either as God or in the person of Jesus, or of the Holy Spirit. So, in my own heart, and in my own soul, I know what the ecstatic experience of the Divine is like.

However, there is one experience I have not written about elsewhere. It involves the intersection of the ecstatic with the erotic, an experience of Divine Presence unlike any other I've encountered.

Soon after I began silently inviting the Divine Presence to be with us during lovemaking, I noticed that both Scott and I became more aware of each other's bodies and more focused on finding those areas that the other enjoyed having stimulated. One day, Scott and I took a lazy spring afternoon off from housework to, as we euphemistically phrase it, Play. With a capital P.

After some time in intimate exploration, I invited Scott to enter me. There are several possible positions for this form of lovemaking, but one or two are especially conducive to a more loving intimacy. Scott chose one of these. Scott wrapped me in his arms and I surrendered to the intimacy of the moment. I prayed, thanking God for God's Presence, and for having brought Scott into my life.

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As I prayed, an awareness of God’s Divine Presence flooded over me. I knew Jesus to be with us, joining with us in our lovemaking. Every one of my senses was heightened. I felt exquisitely the caress of hands, smelled a scent that was heady beyond belief. I heard the beating of Scott’s heart, my heart... another heart. And though my eyes were closed, it seemed that a soft diffuse light glowed just in front of me.

At the very moment that climax arrived, all else washed away except for an overpowering feeling of love unlike anything I have ever experienced. I felt wrapped in arms from both sides, my breath stopped for what seemed an eternity. Both Scott and I commented afterwards that our lovemaking had never before lasted such a long time.

Ever since that day, I’ve longed for more of those experiences. While I have felt God’s Divine Presence on numerous occasions during Scott’s and my lovemaking, none have ever equaled that one very special event in which time stood still.

Eric L. Hays-Strom has led a colorful life that includes living in Kenya as an exchange student and serving in the U.S. Army. He earned a Masters Degree in Catholic Life and Worship from St. Meinrad School of Theology in southern Indiana. He and his husband, Scott, live in Iowa.



Katie’s Mother: Year has been a Roller Coaster Ride

By Katie’s mother
 Reprinted with permission from PFLAG (Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays) Omaha’s June 2009 newsletter: http://www.pflag-omaha.org/newsletter/PFLAGNL_JUNE09.pdf

As all the kids get out of school for the summer, we often reflect back on the school year and how things have changed since last fall. For our family, this year has been a roller coaster ride. Luckily for us, we’ve had the love and support of PFLAGers to help us stay buckled in so we could, for the most part, enjoy the ride...the ups and the downs.

The school year started with the promise that our sweet, bubbly, artistic 2nd grader would be able to transition at her

local Catholic school to the girl God made her. After many meetings and many tears, we came to find out just weeks ago that there would be no transition for Katie in her current school. The person charged with making that decision is Fr. Joe Taphorn, Chancellor with the Omaha Archdiocese.

My husband and I weren’t as concerned with the ultimate decision of “yes” or “no,” but with the manner in which the decision was made. Katie has been attending her school for three years. Fr. Taphorn made his decision without ever meeting Katie, my husband or me, the school counselors, her past or present teachers, or the principal. The decision was, in fact, made before we even had an opportunity to discuss it with the parish pastor.

This “prudential” decision (as coined by Fr. Taphorn) was made without the slightest consideration or education on Katie’s condition. We were formally notified of Fr. Taphorn’s decision through a letter signed by the pastor and principal.

The letter simply stated that “Ben” would not attend their school for third grade. Despite some misquotes in the media, there was clearly no invitation for Katie to attend third grade in any capacity.

My husband isn’t Catholic, so he left it up to me whether I wanted to leave my lifelong religion quietly or loudly and proudly stand up for our daughter and the rest of the LGBT community. Those who know me, probably knew my answer before I did. I talked it over with my husband and he gave me his unconditional support.

I e-mailed some family and friends (many of whom are PFLAGers) and asked that they consider placing an empty envelope in the collection plate on Mother’s Day with a simple statement of support for Katie and/or for the LGBT community at large. I viewed it as a civil way to request a dialogue with the hierarchy of the church regarding the church’s isolation and rejection of the LGBT community and their families. The “empty envelope” campaign took on a life all its own. We began receiving e-mails and letters of support from all over the country. The letters were compassionate and moving.

The Friday morning before Mother’s Day, I received an e-mail from KFAB (radio) advising that they had obtained quotes from Fr. Joe Taphorn about Katie and the “empty envelope” campaign and if I wanted to be heard on the matter, I could appear via telephone at 10:05 that morning. I called my husband and we decided that appearing was the only option. That short radio stint spurred more supportive e-mails and letters.

The week following Mother’s Day, I was again invited to appear on KFAB. This time we had a little more notice so my husband and I (and another PFLAGer) went to the studio to do the show “live.” We requested and I was granted the opportunity to respond to the callers during the second half of the interview.

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As we continued to get support and tearful thanks from the LGBT community for speaking out about these issues, we knew we had to keep advocating for those who are unable to do so for themselves. We kept hearing stories of those who can't advocate publicly for fear of losing their jobs and/or families.

On May 17th, Katie's story appeared on the front page of the Sunday newspaper and on the Sunday and Monday local evening news. The feedback received by the newspaper reporter and the TV news reporter were extremely positive and powerful. Monday, Katie's story could be found on CNN.com and by Tuesday, her story was being aired on local newscasts nationwide and was appearing internationally.

We have received some sharp criticism for allowing Katie's story to go public and for questioning the church, but we know that the coverage has people talking and people are getting educated.

Katie's story is opening hearts. Katie's counselor, Megan Smith, told us that she is being flooded with tearful calls from all over the country telling her that they were convinced that they were the only one like Katie in the whole world and begging her to refer them to a therapist in their area.

This year has been filled with many life lessons for us as the parents of a transgender child. We have been pleasantly surprised at the support we've received from family, friends, and oftentimes complete strangers. A few months back, we heard the spouse of a transwoman say that "there may be only a few silver linings with this condition but one is that instead of having to wait until you die to know who your friends are, with this you find out immediately and get to spend the rest of your life surrounded only by those that truly love you for who you are." We may not have fully appreciated that insight when we heard it, but it rings true for us every day now.

A few months ago, a professor at the University of Nebraska-Omaha posed the question to us as panel members at a GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network)/PFLAG presentation: "If there was a magic pill that would make this condition go away for your child would you give it to her?" What appears to be an easy question, really made me pause and count all of the blessings that have come with this unlikely journey. Among those blessings are all the beautiful, caring, loving friends we've made at PFLAG that we might otherwise never have met.

Our family wishes to extend our heartfelt thanks to all our fellow PFLAGers for all their love and support throughout this last year because we couldn't have made it through without you. My answer to the professor, by the way, was "I don't think so—the world is a better place with her in it—just as God intended her to be."

More information:

Links to KETV 7 Omaha television video stories with interviews of Katie and Katie's Mom

May 18, 2009:

<http://www.ketv.com/video/19491864/index.html>

May 19, 2009:

<http://www.ketv.com/video/19501651/index.html>

Post-script: June 2, 2009

Hi Leo,

Thanks for the well wishes! She's an amazing kid and I know God chose her for this journey for a reason. Sometimes when you talk with her it's like you're talking to a 20 year old and I have to remind myself that she's only 8.

She was begging to watch the news clip (it's the only media she knows about) and so she finally watched it at her counseling appointment. She didn't like Taphorn's quote that "having her return to school as a girl wouldn't be a good learning environment for her or the other children." I assured her that it wasn't a decision made by anyone at the school or parish (to protect that bubble - although I have an interesting follow up to the verbal assault I took from the principal after the "empty envelope" campaign weekend). I told her it was Fr. Mel's (pastor) boss. She said she didn't like him very much and I told her that he's probably a good person but just made a bad choice.

A couple nights later, I was tucking her in and she said, "I've been thinking about that Fr. Mel's boss..." I said, "Yeah, what about him?" She said, "I can't figure out how that's not a good learning environment? I mean how's it not good to teach kids that we're all different in our own ways but we should love everybody anyway?" She's brilliant and we're so lucky that God let us have her...

I like all those other options than Roman Catholic church...because the hierarchy has my head spinning and it seems so unmerciful and unreachable. Not that we haven't been racking our brains about the most effective way to take Katie's story national again to call the hierarchy out on the carpet. How do we find any of those other services in little ol' Omaha???

Anyway, thanks again,
 "Katie's Mother"

School Year Update

New Neighborhood, New School, New Church: Transgender Katie and Family Doing Just Fine

Reprinted with permission from PFLAG Omaha's November 2009 newsletter: http://www.pflag-omaha.org/newsletter/Nov%2009%20PFLAG_NL.pdf

Many fellow PFLAGers (and others) have been asking for an update about our family since our last story in the newsletter. When I last wrote, Katie's story had just gone public. That started a firestorm of controversy that resulted in an over

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whelming outpouring of support and unfortunately, an undercurrent of judgments and criticism. Slowly over the subsequent weeks, we became invisible to the school and church community. There were no crosses burned in our front yard, but we still got the message loud and clear – “we don’t want your kind around here.” We became invisible. After struggling with all the unknowns of moving and starting over somewhere else, we decided to do just that.

In August, we moved neighborhoods, moved school districts, and changed religions. It’s been busy, but each change has brought our family closer together and has enriched our lives. We weren’t able to enroll the kids in a new school until we had proof of residency, so the enrollment didn’t happen until 9 days before the start of the school year. Not having proof of residency until then also meant blindly committing to a new school having no guarantee that they would welcome Katie as herself.

We have been so blessed with our new school. From the first moment, the principal, teachers, and staff have welcomed our family with open arms (and hearts!) The principal scheduled a meeting with herself, the two school counselors, Katie’s new teacher, and the district counselor within two days of our registration. I’m quite certain that just one week before the start of a new school year, they all had plenty to fill their schedules without taking time out to learn about Katie. The decision was made to advise all teachers and staff about Katie, but none of the parents or students. Aside from my tears of concern for all their safety and the tears that our baby started kindergarten – the new school year went off without a hitch. Sometimes we still pinch ourselves that we found a school district that seems to be just a perfect fit for our family.

The kids are doing very well in their new school and this is the only year they’ll all be in the same school, so we’re enjoying that while it lasts. Our oldest, a 6th grader, has been making new friends and his grades have drastically improved. His teachers say that if you walked into the classroom and didn’t know better, you’d never be able to pick him out as a new student.

Katie has made many new friends and was elected to student council as a 3rd grade representative. It’s hard to keep her feet on the ground as she thoroughly enjoys finally just being herself. Her art and writing have taken off like a rocket now that she can freely express herself at school.

Our kindergartner is learning so quickly that we wonder, at times, if his head might explode. We’ve been told he’s quite popular with the girls, but thankfully he’s too young to notice.

One teacher told me that this is the perfect school district for us because other than the first day they were briefed about Katie, no one has said a word about it. Maybe we can cruise through the whole semester as the “ordinary”, boring family we really are....

As for the religion piece, we owe that, in large part, to Erin Grace, the Omaha World Herald staff writer. On May 17, 2009, the day Erin’s story about Katie appeared in the newspaper, the senior ministers from two local churches welcomed our family to their churches. I have a couple of friends who attend the United Church of Christ church, so I responded to that senior minister. He graciously gave me a couple of hours to share with him all of the Catholic teachings and practices that I could no longer tolerate. It had become so clear to me that we needed to find a faith that would provide us and our children with the spiritual nurturing we need to help us make this world a better, more inclusive place. When he shared about his denomination, I was immediately intrigued. After one service, I felt like I was finally home. I talked to my husband about it and he decided to come along — something that had never happened when I was Catholic. We’ve now both officially joined the church as have my parents. Katie and our youngest have joined the choir and our oldest is starting confirmation classes.

Once again we’d like to express our heartfelt thanks to all of our friends at PFLAG. You give us the strength to keep advocating and educating to make this world a safer place for everyone!

Love, Katie’s Mom

BOOK REVIEWS

Dignity, Dogmatism, and Same-Sex Relationships: What Science and Scripture Teach Us

By Gilbert Rossing

Wipf and Stock Publishers, 01/01/2009, 252 pages, paperback, \$28.00 Retail; \$22.40 Web Price

Book Description

In response to the current culture wars over same-sex marriage, hate crime legislation, and the legalization of gay rights, *Dignity, Dogmatism, and Same-Sex Relationships* provides a thorough argument for an ethics of intimacy in same-sex relations, based equally on science and the Bible. After a rigorous interrogation of modern definitions of sexual identity and the usage of biblical passages in support of cultural biases, the book redefines the notion of intimacy to include the physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions that compose human relationships. It thus approaches homosexuality from a whole person perspective and attempts to create understanding, rather than foment divisiveness. This more comprehensive definition of intimacy allows for a compassionate reading of Scripture in ongoing conversations about the nature of homosexuality and the full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons in society. It also encourages religious communities to do for same-sex couples what they already do for heterosexual couples: provide the information, counsel, and encouragement necessary to foster healthy sexual practices, meaningful interpersonal relationships, and a cohesive sense of community.

BOOK REVIEWS (CONTINUED)

In Jupiter's Shadow

By Gregory Gerard

Infinity Publishing; Paperback Ingram/LightningSource

Fall 2009/263 pages/\$15.95

800.937.8000/orders@ingrambook.com

IN JUPITER'S SHADOW: A debut memoir mystery (Infinity; Fall 2009; Paperback; \$15.95) chronicles Gerard's investigative efforts to crack the case — to figure out how to be attracted to girls. As the investigation ensues, he builds a hidden detective agency on the second floor of the family barn, a place to dodge his father's alcoholic mood swings and listen to his favorite show, *The CBS Radio Mystery Theater*. During the search, he finds companionship with his oldest brother (who suffers from hydrocephalus and memory problems) while his angst remains as tightly hidden as the stack of pornography he pilfers from his father's grocery store.

Mentorship from a Jesuit priest (an actor with a Hollywood past) and the shock of a close friend's unexpected death ultimately propel Greg to a point where he must reverse his escape path — and solve the conflict between the shadow of "should be" and the light of self-awareness.

In the end, *IN JUPITER'S SHADOW* tweaks the struggle of adolescent sexual anxiety to take readers on a colorful quest for self definition. With the enthusiasm of an old-style mystery (including a Cast of Characters at each section break!), it explores the ways we all receive messages about what we "should be" in life — and how we often work to keep profound truths hidden from the most important person in our lives: ourselves.

"A humorous, touching, uplifting read." —Georgia Beers, Lammy Award-winning author

"In this disarmingly honest, poignant portrait...Gerard takes us through the importance of emerging from the shadows of other people's expectations."

—Greg DiStefano, author of *Breakdown: Diamonds, Death and Second Chances*.

"Greg Gerard delights and entertains as he energetically and systematically tackles the mysteries of God, family, and later, sexuality...on a colorful quest to solve the ultimate mystery; to discover a sense of self." — Sonja Livingston, author of *Ghostbread*.

About the Author:

"A book once saved my life," Gerard said. "When I was in my early twenties, I read the memoir *The Best Little Boy in the World* by Andrew Tobias. I identified so strongly with the main character that, for the first time in my life, I realized my feelings of isolation were deceptive. The book propelled me forward on my path to self acceptance. Somebody once told me that reading a book is a gift we give ourselves. I firmly believe that."

"If my book helps even one person feel less isolated — less condemned by society, or God, or even themselves — it will all be worth it..."

Greg Gerard, who grew up as the youngest in a devout Catholic family in rural Western New York, dreamed of escape and adventure. He was different from his older siblings; he was "The Caboose." While his older brothers and sisters went to public school, he alone attended Saint Michael's — where a friendly nun with sturdy shoes and a ubiquitous guitar reminded him of his favorite movie, *The Sound of Music*. At night, he slept with boards under his sheets — so he too could be as holy as the Saints he read about.

Mystery surrounded young Greg. At church, the priest dipped his head, whispering indistinguishable prayers. At home, the Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, and his favorite, Jupiter Jones of The Three Investigators, provided an endless supply of intrigue. He devoured their stories, mimicked their behaviors, and dreamed of the day when he too could solve a real-life puzzle.

At thirteen, Greg's own mystery presented itself in the most unlikely place — the steamy bathtub on the second floor. He discovered sexuality — and sensed that it was "wrong" for a boy to think about Superman while doing so.

All God's Children: Teaching Children About Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity

Burrill, Melany [Fort Wayne, IN: LifeQuest, 2009; 20 pp., ISBN 1-893270-48-0].

Single copy \$7.00, 10+ copies @ \$5.00 plus shipping and handling

All God's Children is an essential guide to open and caring conversations with young children about gender and sexual orientation. You'll find that this small, user-friendly book addresses your concerns, your questions, and your search for just the right words; it also suggests ideas for sermons and classroom activities. As you read, you'll learn to model openness, respect, and the affirming belief that everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender difference, is a beloved child of God. Anyone who has a loving relationship with young children — parents, family, friends, pastors, Sunday School teachers — will benefit from reading and discussing *All God's Children*.

BUY: <http://www.godloveseachone.org/allgodschildren/>



Letter to a Bishop

By Joe Gentilini, Dignity/Columbus (OH)

Context: As most of you know, I have been sending a 3-page letter to the bishops of the United States telling them my story of being Gay and Catholic and the struggle that I went through to integrate both facets of my being. In that letter, I also tell them the comfort and joy I have experienced in union with my partner Leo Radel. I usually send about six letters a month and am just going through the list of US Catholic Bishops who are not retired. Recently, I received a truly pastoral letter from one such bishop who affirmed my relationship with Leo but admitted that he “struggled” with the concept of gay marriage. I wrote the following response to him. Mark Matson has asked if I would allow *QV* to publish my response to this bishop if he was not identified. I agreed. Peace, Joe Gentilini

September 11, 2009

Dear Bishop _____:

I want to thank you for your pastoral letter of August 24, 2009! I have wanted to write back to you regarding your comment on marriage for gays and lesbians, but life has been busy. I was supposed to teach a course on the “Sociology of Disability” at the local Catholic University in Columbus, but it was cancelled because the number of students was too low. After a week of school starting, I was told that it was ‘back on.’ So, things have been a bit hectic

Saying this, however, does not mean that I have not thought about your struggle with “gay marriage.” I will admit that I also struggle with the concept of marriage between two men or two women. And yet, I feel very married to my partner Leo, with whom I have lived for 28 years. While I would have loved to celebrate my love for him in a Catholic Church, Leo and I “settled” to have a Mass and renewal of our vows at our 15th anniversary in 1996 before 160 family members and friends in a Presbyterian Church, officiated by a Catholic priest from another Diocese whose name was not used in any of the programs. As one of our friends said, “I watched people in the church and saw how moved they were. This was obviously a celebration of love.” I must admit, it brought our intimacy to a much deeper level and I thought it was deep before that!

Just as important, however, are the benefits that we would have if we could actually be legally married in this country. For one, when Leo gets the flu he dehydrates within hours and I have had to put him in the hospital on about six or seven occasions since 1981. Without an expensive legal document legally in hand, I have no standing at these times because I am only a “friend” in the parlance of hospital policy and therefore “not family.” If I was married, this would not be an issue. In addition, I am not eligible to receive part of his social security if Leo’s death precedes mine, nor could he receive mine. I am not able to put him on my health insurance and he is not able to put me on his. If one of

us loses our health insurance, the other would not be able to do anything about it. These are only three of the hundreds of financial benefits that would be ours if we were legally married. Because we live in a civil society founded on the principle that all Americans have a right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” I believe that we should be allowed to legally marry, even though Churches would prohibit their blessing.

As I said above, however, I struggle with the concept of gay marriage. I understand the Church’s position that marriage is the union of a man and a woman for their mutual support and for procreation. At the same time, the Church allows two persons who physically are not able to procreate because of age and/or because of physical sterility. These persons are allowed the benefits of physical and emotional comfort even though they are not able to reproduce and this fact is known before they married.

As my Dominican training states, Acts follow Being. Since I am homosexual by orientation, I would only be able to emotionally bond with a man in any union. To me this appears to be similar to the heterosexual person who is not able to physically procreate and yet is allowed to legally marry. God created me homosexual and I can only become holy as a gay person. To prohibit me from legally or religiously uniting with Leo for physical and emotional comfort does not seem American to me; nor does it seem that Jesus would demand this either.

I hold this question in my heart and my prayer before God, and I ask for your prayers. I have begun to include you by name in my own daily prayer.

With deep respect and peace,
Joseph Gentilini, Ph.D.



Study: No Link Between Gay Priests and Sex Abuse Scandal

By Thomas C. Fox

Created Nov 19, 2009

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It has been so unfair. Elements in our Catholic community have repeatedly placed the blame of the sex abuse scandal that has rocked our church at the feet of a gay clergy.

It has been a case of guilty until proven innocent.

Now, during their annual meeting this week in Baltimore, the US Catholic Bishops reviewed a preliminary version of a study they commissioned on the reasons for clergy sexual abuse.

The study by John Jay College of Criminal Justice researchers has found that being gay had no correlation to the sex abuse scandal.

In a presentation to the bishops on Tuesday, Margaret Smith of John Jay said: "What we are suggesting is that the idea of sexual identity be separated from the problem of sexual abuse. At this point, we do not find a connection between homosexual identity and the increased likelihood of subsequent abuse from the data that we have right now."

This allowed Marianne Duddy-Burke, executive director of the LGBT Catholic group DignityUSA, to say she welcomed "the news for gay people, gay priests, and our families and friends."

She said the John Jay report confirms other studies in concluding that sexual orientation is not connected to pedophilia or other sex crimes.

"We hope that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church will finally accept this finding, since it has been borne out through their own study," Duddy-Burke said.

According to some reports, there have been some 14,000 claims of abuse and the cost to the church is running at about \$2.6 billion in settlements since 1950.

DignityUSA is the nation's oldest and foremost organization of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Catholics. Founded in 1969, the organization has members and chapters throughout the United States.

By and large, Dignity chapters are not allowed to meet on church property — and this, too, is a scandal that should haunt us to the core of our souls.

John Jay Researchers Offer Update On Causes And Context Study; Early Findings Confirm Steep Decline In Sexual Abuse Cases After 1985, Emphasize the Importance Of Seminary Training

USCCB News Release November 17, 2009

WASHINGTON—Researchers from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice presented an Interim Report on the Causes and Context Study on sexual abuse of minors by clergy at the November assembly of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). The bishops called for the Study as part of their response to the sexual abuse crisis when they adopted the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People in 2002.

The Causes and Context research seeks to explain the rise in incidence of sexual abuse by priests in the late 1960s and 1970s and its subsequent decline after 1985. Karen Terry, PhD, the principal researcher on the Study, reported on the synthesis of information from several independent data sources that confirmed the explanation for this variation that was previously reported to the bishops. The Study involves gathering and analyzing archival research and collecting data from priests, psychologists, sociologists, and the U.S. bishops. Funding was provided by the USCCB, the National Institute of Justice, and several foundations.

The Causes and Context Study was pursued by the bishops in order to understand more fully the problem of clergy sexual abuse and what needs to be done to keep children safe in the Church's care.

The completed Causes and Context Study is expected in December of 2010. Findings will be made public so that what the Catholic Church learns will benefit others working with youth in and outside of the Church.

The Interim Report found that:

-- Data on cases of abuse reported after 2002 reflect the same pattern of incidence found nationally – the rise of sexual abuse in the 1960s and the decline in the 1980s. There is no evidence that unreported cases will be brought forward that change the overall time frame of the problem.

-- The pattern of deviant sexual behavior by clerics is consistent with several other behavioral changes in society between 1960 and 1990, including use of drugs, and an increase in divorce and criminal behavior.

-- Clergy who as seminarians had explicit human formation preparation seem to have been less likely to abuse than those without such preparation.

John Jay Researchers Offer Update On Causes And Context Study; Early Findings Confirm Steep Decline In Sexual Abuse Cases After 1985, Emphasize the Importance Of Seminary Training
Continued from page 17

-- Diocesan responses to charges of abuse by clerics changed substantially over a 50-year period, with decreases in reinstatement and more administrative leave given to abusers in recent years.

Editor's Note: After considerable research on the Internet, especially the websites of the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic News Service (CNS), I found noticeably absent the response by Margaret Smith of John Jay College to the query as to whether the study indicated that homosexuality should be considered when evaluating a candidate for the priesthood. Smith responded that "If that exclusion were based on the fact that that person would be more probable than any other candidate to abuse, we do not find that at this time."

Also see the article "Study: No Link Between Gay Priests and Sex Abuse Scandal" on page 17 of this publication.

Reflections on DignityUSA Convention 2009

By Dennis Benoit, President, Dignity/Canada/Dignité

...This now brings me to share with you some views by various speakers at DignityUSA's 40th anniversary convention in San Francisco I attended in July 2009.

In her keynote address, Dr. Mary Hunt reminded us that an anniversary is "a time to lift up, not to be self critical, to say thank you to one another, and to express our love in action." To this she added "... protesting the official church should now be secondary, and that we need to address the needs of other marginalized groups." And what Dr. Hunt said that really challenged me to re-think my own spiritual journey was when she said: "The institutional church has left us, not that we have left the church." Food for thought for us all, don't you think?

The next step on my journey was to hear another keynote speaker, Richard Rodriguez, who titled his address: "Freedom To Love." He pointed out that the God of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims is a desert God, and that great prophets went to the desert to be alone. (Did not Jesus withdraw from the crowds occasionally to a lonely place to be with God?) Was it not an inner discernment or quiet place that we discovered our sexual orientation? And wouldn't we all agree with Rodriguez when he said: "... it is a gift of God to find a lover, a partner"?

Present at this wonderful convention were many other speakers, but only a few of them I will quote here. Even out of context, their remarks need little or no comment from me. A few examples now follow.

In John McNeill's talk, "Sex As God Intended," he said that "...spiritual discernment is often better than the use of Scripture..." and "...nobody outside ourselves can tell us when sex is allowed; we must listen to our inner voice. This is where God dwells as well." And "...older accounts of creation specified intimacy, not procreation."

Moving on to Sister Jeannine Gramick, S.L.'s "Bombs, Bishops, and Big Tents: Power and the Gospel," she provided an excellent overview as to how the papacy became so prominent and powerful over the centuries. Vatican II attempted to return to the early church by emphasizing that power should be used for service, not to be used over people. And very strongly, Sr. Jeannine urged us laity "to inform bishops what we are doing. Stand up for what we believe." Here again, discernment is needed to know the difference between protest, dialogue, and inform, and to know when each is appropriate to the issue at hand.

One last speaker whose remarks I wish to share with you was Fr. Thomas P. Bonacci whose presentation was titled "Jesus Beyond Gender." His reflections are the result of his many contacts with persons struggling to connect with their dignity, and who "have found a friend in Jesus. Oddly enough, this Jesus is a Jesus beyond gender and a Jesus beyond text. The wounded bodies of these struggling humans both adult and children reveal the woundedness of their souls. These wounds have become in many cases the wounds of love." He later exclaimed "Let Them Know Who You Are" — actually a quote from the movie "Milk." Very poignantly Fr. Thomas said: "And the Word of God came to Harvey Milk." Bonacci would also echo John McNeil by saying: "No matter how distinct we are from one another, no one has the right to prevent another from discovering and living out our own uniqueness." Finally, from Fr. Thomas, "We may be embarrassed at the phrase, 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' Each one of us will need to confront the imagery this phrase invokes in our consciousness.... The nameless 'beloved disciple' finds reality in all who seek to love deeply and uncompromisingly."

A reminder for all you intrinsically good people, please read my review of the book *The Man Jesus Loved*, in which the author beautifully and extensively explores this intriguing relationship. The review is posted on our website at <http://www.dignitycanada.org>.

