

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.

This issue:

| | |
|---|-------|
| DignityUSA Convention Recap | p. 1 |
| Homily for DignityUSA Convention Liturgy | p. 4 |
| Intersections of Justice: Plenary Address for DignityUSA Convention | p. 7 |
| All Are Welcome: a Convention Reflection | p. 9 |
| Intergenerational Dialogues: a Convention Reflection | p. 10 |
| Reflections on Plenary Address: Claiming Our Catholic Social Justice Traditions... | p. 11 |
| La Frontera: Notes from a Convention Workshop | p. 12 |
| Holy Tears | p. 17 |

Editor's Note: It's the issue we have all been waiting for: the Convention issue of the *Quarterly Voice*! While not all-encompassing by any means, we hope the pieces included here give you a flavor of the 2013 Convention and inspire in you the same joy, energy, and hope experienced by Convention attendees.

DignityUSA Convention Recap

By Mateo Williamson, DignityUSA



We celebrate the success of DignityUSA's 21st Biennial Convention, which marks over 42 years of ministry and advocacy for the LGBT community in the Catholic Church. Dignity's call to reform and justice for those marginalized

within the Church has now bridged several generations, and the fruits of this unceasing labor were evident at this year's national gathering, which brought together nearly 300 attendees from across the country, with a span of over eight decades in age. This year's biennial Convention was held in progressive and lively Minneapolis, Minnesota, July 4-7, 2013.

The Convention's setting near the Mississippi River lent an allusive hand to its theme, "Let Justice Roll Like A River," as well as to the powerful time of celebration and commitment to justice for those involved in recent successes. On May 14, 2013, Minnesota became the 12th state in the nation to recognize marriage equality into law despite the fervent efforts of Archbishop Nienstedt, who used over \$600,000 from the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis to send DVDs to registered Catholic households telling them to vote "yes" on November 6, 2012, on a constitutional amendment defining marriage as between one man and one woman. Minnesotans rejected this attempt to limit marriage equality by six percentage points at the polls; then, in 2013 the Minnesota legislature passed its marriage equality bill. Present at the opening ceremony of Dignity's 2013 Convention were several key figures who helped make this success a reality, including marriage equality activist and DignityUSA Program Manager Jim Smith, Senator Scott Dibble, Senator Patricia Torres Ray, and Catholics for Marriage Equality of Minnesota's director Michael Bayly. All gave emotional personal testimonies, thanking their fellow Minnesotans for upholding the human dignity of their LGBT brothers and sisters.

The festive ceremony on the evening of July 4th began with the traditional parade of banners from all involved chapters, caucuses, and organizations. Energizing introductions by DignityUSA Executive Director Marianne Duddy-Burke, President Lourdes Rodriguez-Nogues, and Convention Chair Marty Grochala grounded attendees in the significant purpose for gathering from all corners of the nation to experience the communion of an affirming atmosphere and celebrate their Catholic faith in accordance with the open arms of the Gospel. Messages of hope and gratitude were relayed via video from Fr. John

Continued on page 2

DignityUSA Convention Recap, continued from page 1

McNeill, Senator Al Franken, and retired Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, providing a strong sense of solidarity and connection in illuminating how every person's contribution to justice creates the movement for change. Twin Cities based songwriter Bret Hesla then concluded our first evening by leading us in song to the theme of justice, equality, inclusion, and peace.

Plenary sessions during the Convention expanded on the theme of "Let Justice Roll Like A River." These sessions gave important perspectives on the theme of justice as it applies to our world and faith communities today, providing an overall context for all of the week's events. Maureen Fiedler, Sister of Loretto and host of the radio show Interfaith Voices, and Jim Nickoloff, a liberation theology expert, shed light on the history of the Catholic tradition of the preferential option for the poor, and how our long-standing tenets call us to action on the issues we face today. The second plenary addressed key justice issues in our society and their intersection with the LGBT experience, with discussions by Jamie Manson and Nikki Young about how our stories of struggle and liberation should not isolate us, but rather bring us towards those who also yearn to know the fullness of dignity and equality in society and church. Finally, in the third plenary session, Patrick Cheng, Rebecca Voelkel, and Delfin Bautista provided insight into the challenges that we face in acting as witnesses to social justice in a complex and multicultural world.



L to R: Delfin Bautista, Patrick Cheng, and Leo Egashira

Over 12 different workshops were also offered, covering a wide range of topics from "Misogyny and Homophobia" to "Asian American Lesbians and Gay Men in the Catholic Church." Attendees even had the opportunity to engage the community through hands-on justice events, by serving a

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Continued on page 3

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The *DATELINE* is distributed to persons on the Dignity News Listserv in electronic format ONLY. Sign up at <https://www.dignityusa.org/civicism/mailling/subscribe?reset=1&gid=98#> 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 LGBT 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 through out 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.

DignityUSA Convention Recap, continued from page 2

July 4th meal to the youth of Minneapolis, or by engaging in a session with Jim Smith and Francis DeBernardo of New Ways Ministry on using personal testimony to mobilize Catholics for LGBT dignity and equality. A centralized location in the heart of the city and a Mississippi River cruise provided the opportunity to connect with God's great creation and the wonder of a diverse and vibrant environment.

Many key social justice figures were in attendance at the Convention, including Fr. Roy Bourgeois, longtime activist and founder of the School of Americas Watch. Fr. Bourgeois received the Dignity Risk-Taker, Justice-Maker award and gave a moving speech about his experience being forced out of the Maryknoll Order and laicized by the Vatican in 2012 for his public support of women's ordination. His presence was made even more poignant by the active involvement of Roman Catholic Womenpriests in the Convention's women's retreat, speaker sessions, and liturgies. His words reminded us of the call to live out justice every day, and to stand in solidarity with those who are marginalized, even though we may face ominous consequences for doing so.

A record number of young adults attended this week's events, and they gathered within a multigenerational group to direct a panel discussion on leadership and ways to increase young adult participation in Dignity chapters. The hundreds present also had the chance to break out into discussion groups throughout the Convention in order to address the needs of different communities, including Dignity women, transgender individuals, Defenders (leather-levi ministry), Latino/Latina/Hispanic individuals, and Parents of LGBT daughters and sons.

Many were held in special remembrance during this Convention, including Father Andre Boulanger, founder of the Dignity/Arizona chapter, and Jim Busen, President of DignityUSA from 1985 to 1989. Jim was held in the hearts of all in attendance throughout the Convention, and he died on July 6th following a three-year battle with cancer. More about Jim's life and activism work, as well as an upcoming Dignity Chicago Celebration of Life in his honor, can be found here: <http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/lgbt/>

Continued on page 4

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DignityUSA Convention Recap, continued from page 3

PASSAGES-James-A-Bussen-dies/43607.html

The riveting and energizing liturgies, the tangible sense of community and empowerment, and the uplifting feeling of unity that comes from placing oneself within that rolling, unstoppable river of advocates joined for peace and justice—every aspect of this year's Convention spoke of the glory of God as we celebrated our nation's steps closer to a more just reality for all.

The next DignityUSA Convention will be held July 2-5, 2015 in Seattle, WA. Opportunities to pre-register can be found at: <https://www.dignityusa.org/civicrm/event/info?id=48&reset=1>

The theme for the Convention is "God's Love: Enduring as the mountains, Endless as the sea," and a team of planners are already working to create a memorable and exciting experience for our next gathering. We hope you will consider joining us for a powerful time of justice, fellowship, and renewal as we surround ourselves with the wonder of God's glory in the beautiful city of Seattle.



Homily for DignityUSA Convention Liturgy

By Deb Myers, DignityUSA Board member



The author delivers her homily

Peace of heart, mind, and body to all of us! What wonderful readings [Isaiah 66: 10-14c; excerpt from *A Lesbian Feminist Voice* by Carter Heyward; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20]! We have heard this gospel many times and know the lines well. I hope today is experienced with new ears and open hearts, perhaps because of where

each of us is in our own spiritual journey, or because in the context of what we have experienced this weekend. I hope you will hold your hearing of the good news today in your heart.

I would like to share how this gospel challenges not only me, but challenges us as individuals, and as communities working together, and as a movement working for justice within our Church and society.

I come to you and share my thoughts out of my lived experience, as a white woman, a Catholic lesbian, an American, a partner, a gardener, and as one who struggles with the daily and the mundane. But I think most importantly, I share with you today as someone who is broken, seeking healing, and as a laborer for justice alongside other laborers!

Take a moment to contemplate all you are and bring here today! What richness, what a harvest! What a weekend we have shared together; what a rich harvest. We are truly grateful laborers who have prepared the soil, planted the seeds, and tended the fields to bring us here today; not just for this weekend of reunion and reconnection, but for 43 years of ministry!

Continued on page 5

Homily for DignityUSA Convention..., continued from page 4

As individuals, as families, as Dignity chapters, as communities, and as a movement, we have stepped outside of our comfort zone, outside of the box, outside of the place we called home and cultivated a spirituality and theology of justice and peace for our communities and for some of the communities that intersect with ours.

We have come to this harvest today because we have labored. This harvest has not come easily *many times*, whether we have labored as individuals in a community, or as part of this movement. We have endured trials to reap this harvest. We have battled the pests and the weeds and we know them well: how can you be LGBT or an ally and be Catholic? You know the Catholic Church will never change! How come more people don't come to Dignity? Why do we have to change the language? And, "Oh, that's just a phase."



Liturgy choir leads the congregation in song

And we have weathered the storms: the countless Vatican letters and statements, the AIDS epidemic, expulsion from Catholic Church property, denial of the sacraments, alienation from our families and friends, just to name a very few.

Despite all we have been through, we have worked for and seen the harvest, we have spoken truth to power, we have remained rooted in our Catholic faith, we have challenged and changed the Church, especially those in the pew, and I dare say we have even changed the hierarchy (not that they will admit it). We have claimed our goodness, we have ministered to the sick and dying, we have saved lives, empowered women, and embraced the transgender and bisexual communities. We have found a theology and spirituality of our own, created our own liturgies, called our own presiders, become the "church" that nurtures and

nourishes us, and, what's more, we have brought along our families and friends!

We have and are living this gospel message! We have brought peace to many and we have, indeed, been given the power to tread on snakes and scorpions!

The harvest is abundant!

Nevertheless, we must not rejoice that we have made it. We must not get complacent, boast too much, or lose sight of the larger picture. No, we must create something with our abundant harvest. We cannot let it sit and rot and go to waste! It is not enough to bring in the harvest; we must feed those who need our harvest! We must pay attention as we move forward.

I think we sometimes entertain the idea that we have made it and reached the end of the harvest, thinking that we no longer need to labor in this field of justice and peace.

We cannot give into the notion that when we have civil rights and civil marriage that we have somehow solved our struggle! If we do, then we will lose ourselves and the richness of OUR harvest! All we need to do is look at our sisters and brothers in the women's movement and the civil rights movement to know that sexism and racism are still very much alive.

We are called to transform our harvest not only to nurture ourselves but to feed those who need our harvest. And there are still so many who do: There are young men and women who are coming out and are rejected and lost; the transgender community, that is still seen as different and often left out, even in our own community; women who are seeking a place where their voice will be honored; people of color who are struggling to overcome the cultural barriers of coming out.

There is the work still to be done regarding legal and civil rights. There are still 35 states that do not have marriage equality, and the battle is clearly not over despite the remarkable decision of the Supreme Court last week. Our civil rights in most cities

Continued on page 6

Homily for DignityUSA..., continued from page 5

and states are not guaranteed. Our jobs, our families, our homes and our health are still at risk. We are changing the laws, a critical step towards justice, but changing hearts and minds is essential for true justice and true peace.

Then there is our Church. While according to polls, Catholics in the pews are supportive of our issues, the faithful are hungry and in need of ways that they can support our movement from the pews. There are some parishes and schools that are supportive in quiet ways, but lack the knowledge or support to help us realize our vision: full and equal participation in all aspects of the Church. How can we instill the principles of social justice in these allies to mobilize them despite Church teaching and hierarchical pressures?



Congregants at the liturgy sing "All Are Welcome"

There are communities beyond our US borders who look to us for guidance for their next steps toward justice.

And so much more.

Our journey for justice and peace is not over.

We are coming into a new season, a new time, *a critical time*, in our journey as a movement towards justice, not just as Dignity but as a larger LGBT movement. Let us not become the status quo, be incorporated into the majority, assimilate.

If we are who we say we are then we will heed the call of the gospel and commit ourselves to continue our work to bring justice and peace to our world.

Let us not rejoice that the spirits are subject to us. Instead, let us rejoice because our names are written in heaven. Let us rejoice because we *do* justice!

The harvest is not just about us.

We must ask ourselves, what are we laboring for? Is it just for our small corner of the field and the harvest? No, I believe it is for justice and peace for all people, and we are all people! We are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, straight, **and** the immigrant, the poor, the widow, the orphan, the veteran, the person of color, women ...and the earth.

Any farmer, that desires sustainability will tell you that biodiversity is essential to keep the land healthy, keep infestations of pests down, and to weather the storms, because when one crop in the field suffers, there are others in the field that will help the farmer keep the harvest coming in. For an abundant harvest, we need one another!

Peacemaking and justice-making are hard work! It is not single-issued; it is complex, messy work.

We must be willing to do this work to make it happen. In today's fast-paced world of technology and instant results, we expect peace and justice right now. And I hate to tell you, it will not come in a microwavable cardboard box in the freezer section of the grocery store!

And so we ask ourselves: How will we manage to do all this work? We, the few laborers, must go out together, sharing our many gifts and talents with one another, striving for an inclusive justice. We will need to get our hands dirty, sweat a little, make mistakes, forgive one another, build relationships with new and different people and groups to share our vision, and plant lots of seeds and hope that they take. We will worry, we will wonder if our work will have a yield, and we will wonder if the labor is worth it. But remember, we have good, rich soil to work with; we have prepared the field.

We have the gospels, we have the social teachings and the social justice traditions of our Cath-

Continued on page 7

Homily for DignityUSA..., continued from page 6

olic faith (elevated for us this weekend), and we have our own documents of spirituality and theology. We stand on the shoulders of many who have gone before us and prepared the way for us to do our work. And, we have our own lived experiences as a people of faith.

We must go out to do this work without a walking stick, knapsack, or sandals (not much of a fashion statement). We must be willing to step out of our comfort zones; go places we have not been, learn



The Eucharistic stole placed on the author during liturgy

new ways, with our hearts open and vulnerable, trusting our lived experience and trusting in God's grace. Be countercultural! Remember we are bringing a peace this world cannot give!

Some of our seeds will take, and we must be diligent and patient, ever watchful and mindful of our work, so that when the insects, the weeds, the storms, and the droughts come

(because they will, that's just part of the harvest), we will be ready.

We must be *rooted* in peace.

Always discerning our path, working *through* our struggles, conflicts, and problems, so that we can keep moving forward and not get stuck in places that hold us down and hold us back, shaking the dust that clouds our sight and muddies our vision.

We must continue to be prophets, we must (as Nickie likes to say) continue to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. We must continue to "be church," so that we become the church we wish to see, and we must continue in the daily, mun-

dane, tedious work that nurtures and sustains our communities.

There is so much work to do!

So, as we are sent out from this place, let us remember our hunger for righteousness and that we are members of ONE BODY called to live in right relation with one another, so that justice will roll like a river!

Intersections of Justice: Plenary Address for DignityUSA Convention

By Jamie L. Manson, M. Div

Editor's Note: Below is an excerpt from Jamie Manson's plenary address "Intersections of Justice."



Plenary speakers Jamie Manson (left) with Nikki Young

Being a lesbian at Xavier was pretty easy. Being a woman was much more challenging because on any given day, I was reminded that my body was an obstacle to ways in which I was able to serve and be present to the community.

Though I had the ordination degree, a Master of Divinity, and all of the right pastoral training, I could not baptize the baby, or give the second grader first communion, or marry the couple, though I had done all of the work to prepare them for the Sacrament, because of this body; though I had passion and zeal for the poor, the homeless, and the broken, I could not hear their confession and grant them absolution, because of this body. And, in some ways most painfully, though I did my very best to serve the community in all of its work, its joys, its sorrows, its neuroses, I always had the sense that could never be deemed as valuable or authoritative as a priest, even by our very progressive female and male parishioners, because of this unordained and unordainable body.

The parishioners did not act this way out of

Continued on page 8

Intersections of Justice ..., continued from page 7

malice. This is just how Roman Catholics have been inculcated and indoctrinated. To my surprise, I even met some gay men who would be quite content in a church that accepted homosexuality but continued to ban the ordination of women.

While I was still at Xavier, I happened to hear a speech by openly gay Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson. At one point, he addressed his sorrow at the misogyny he still sometimes witnesses among some gay men. He asked, "When will we gay men realize that the reason the Church hates us, is because they hated women first. The hatred of gay men is rooted in the original hatred of the feminine." When gay men exclude women, they participate in their own oppression.

By banning women from serving as priests, the Roman Church is saying that God simply cannot work in the body of a woman as God can in the body of a man. The institutional Church places limits on God and God's own capacity to work inside God's very own creation! Now, not only is that chutzpah on a cosmic level, it also runs completely contrary to good Catholic sacramental teaching, which tells us that all of creation is capable of revealing goodness, holiness, and God Godself.

For over forty years, Dignity has refused to allow the Roman Catholic Church to tell them that the natural desires of their bodies and their expressions of love are intrinsically disordered. Why then do some in the Dignity community still allow the Roman Catholic Church to dictate the ways in which God can work through the bodies of women and the ways in which women express their spiritual authority? You have not let the hierarchy control your bodies, why let them control the bodies of women?

The mistreatment of women in the Roman Catholic Church is as indefensible as its mistreatment of LGBT persons. We know that. So why do some Dignity communities still abide by the institution's exclusion of women by perpetuating it in their weekly liturgies?

I'm not suggesting that there is one, right way to model inclusive, ministerial leadership. But I

am insisting that we put our creativity and courage into trying to envision new forms. Catholic communities are in desperate need of new models of leadership. The old forms of priesthood are not cutting it in the institutional Roman Church, so why should they work inside Catholic communities like Dignity?

This is a situation that cries out for intersecting justice. Every year, dozens if not hundreds of LGBT Catholics graduate with Master of Divinity degrees, and have no home, no church where they are welcome to serve and use their gifts. Dignity's legacy of self-empowerment on behalf of gays and lesbians compels us to take risks to empower the women, and may I add transgender persons, who clearly have been called by God to be ministerial leaders, but were never given an opportunity because of their bodies or gender expressions.

Are Dignity communities truly reflections of intersectional justice and inclusion? Four decades ago, Dignity prophetically freed itself of harmful church doctrines so that gay men and lesbians could experience true inclusion in their church community. Isn't it time to use the privilege of being free of Roman authority to envision and model ministerial leadership that truly honors the dignity of women and transgender persons, too? If we really want to honor the Catholic tradition, we should be in solidarity with those who are also oppressed by unjust church doctrines. I firmly believe that our answers to these questions will determine the future and the viability of this church community.

Our own stories of struggle and liberation ought not isolate us, but on the contrary, bring us toward others who also yearn to know the fullness of dignity and equality in society and church. LGBT people have a compelling voice to offer others who fight their marginalization and oppression. In just a matter of years, we have convinced the majority of Catholics in the US that we deserve not only full inclusion in the Church, but that our relationships deserve to be called marriage.

In these ways, straight people have been powerful allies to the LGBT community in society and the church. However, I do believe that so-called "Francis effect" could pose a new challenge to Cath-

Continued on page 9

Intersections of Justice ..., continued from page 8

olic women and LGBT people. The new pope's commitment to the poor and marginalized, his acts of humility, have been compelling thus far. However, he has also referred to feminists as "chauvinists in skirts," and believes that women's roles are best expressed in motherhood or virginity. He has called same-sex marriage an "anthropological setback," and recently has spoken of a nefarious, corrupt "gay cabal" inside the Curia.

When I have raised these concerns, some of my straight, progressive Catholic friends have called me a hater, or have told me that I already decided that I don't like the Pope, so I am incorrigibly biased, or that I'm preoccupied with my own desires for justice and cannot see the good this Pope will do for so many others.

Again, this is a situation that calls for a recognition of the intersections of justice.

We must help our straight allies understand that though women and LGBT people are achieving justice in our country, women and LGBT persons globally suffer a disproportionate amount of violence, poverty, and discrimination. The Roman Catholic Church is powerful in many of these areas of our world. Creating church doctrines that truly honor the dignity of women and LGBT persons would be highly influential in achieving justice for all of God's children in the most desperate and broken parts of our world.

All Are Welcome: a Convention Reflection

By Mateo Williamson, DignityUSA

It is difficult to describe exactly what the Dignity Convention of 2013 meant to me. I have tried to accurately relay the experience to some of my friends here in Arizona, but in vain. How do I capture the excitement I felt as I realized I had actually made it successfully to Minneapolis, and furthermore to the correct hotel (in itself a miracle)? Or when I nervously shook the hands of social justice greats like Fr. Bernard Lynch and Fr. Roy Bour-

geois? Or, while sporting plaid shorts and a plaid shirt on departure day due to my packing faux pas, I embraced all my wonderful new friends good-bye and nobody even batted an eye? (If that isn't true friendship, I don't know what is).

But truly, to even approach what I was feeling throughout that week, the two years prior to the Convention form a significant context. Almost two years ago, I found my way back to the Catholic Church right around the time that I was coming out as a transgender male to my very Catholic family. I will never forget my first time back in confession, tears flooding my eyes as the priest asked me to "put it in my own words." I could barely whisper the word "transgender" because I felt so much shame based on my family's early reaction to my coming out. But the priest's response was not at all what I expected. It turns out he was one of few priests who knew about what being transgender meant. In addition, during the Convention I learned from others that back in the 80's this priest had allowed for a Dignity Mass to be held at his parish. He was the one affirming priest at that student center, and I had happened upon his confessional. I have no doubt that God was allowing the collective love of Dignity to hold me in that moment, and that has not been the only time I have been touched by this ministry. I had been aware of the existence of Dignity through the internet for several years before my tumultuous coming out experience, and just knowing this group existed became a subconscious sanctuary for me.

A few months later, I was introduced in a chance way to Dr. Eugene McMullan, the editor of the newsletter for Catholics for Marriage Equality of California. We met through the Facebook page of Fr. James Martin, an increasingly vocal advocate for LGBT Catholics, and thus began an internet-mediated mentorship that enabled me to grow in my faith identity as an LGBT Catholic at a crucial time when, inundated by Church negativity, I was about to throw in the towel yet again. Eugene introduced me even more to the work of Dignity and welcomed me to write for CME's newsletter. I fumbled through my first ever biblical reflection, which meant that I was actually reading the Bible on my own for essentially the first time (I don't believe he was aware of that).

Continued on page 10

All Are Welcome..., continued from page 9

In this way, from my student confines here in Tucson, I connected with Dignity without ever having been to a Dignity Mass. This made my Convention experience all the more magical and full of emotion. I felt as though I was connecting to the rich history of a social justice movement I had only accessed from the outside, and I found myself falling in love with the spirituality of the justice aspect of our faith.

I will admit that the year prior, I had scoured everything I could find about affirming Catholic priests—in particular gay priests. I was desperate to understand why I felt called so strongly to a Church that seemed to deny my full sense of humanity, and I felt that the answer must lie partly in the stories of clergy who had dedicated their lives to this Church and now found themselves marginalized in their own spiritual home. I dug out hidden narratives from the depths of the internet—old scanned testimonies and often anonymous blogs and books. Some of the most exciting moments were when I stumbled upon the stories of openly gay priests like Frs. Donal Godfrey, Geoff Farrow, Bob Pierson, and John McNeill. Every find was like a gold mine to me, making me feel less alone in the juxtaposition of who I was and what I believed. Coming to the Convention brought that alive for me.

From meeting other young adults to connecting with those who have carried Dignity forward throughout the years; from being welcomed among the leather Defenders, to participating in the transgender caucus, the Convention was the most memorable experience of my year. I still feel like it was a miracle that I made it to Minneapolis, in large part due to the generosity of donors to the scholarship fund. I can't thank you enough for making this experience possible for me.

What makes Dignity so special to me is that by the end of the Convention, I knew I had found a forever home. When I came out, I experienced the loss of family, friends, and community. I struggled to find a place where I felt welcome in my own faith. Dignity helped me bridge the rift between my identity and my faith, or rather, to realize that God never intended for that gap to exist. Being LGBT is not a

broken part of who I am, but rather an integral and blessed part of my spiritual self.

I have confidence that one day, while perhaps far into the future, the Catholic Church hierarchy will faithfully uphold the dignity of all people regardless of gender or sexuality, and Dignity will become obsolete as an organization in the most beautiful way, because its mission will be complete. It will someday exist only in history, like a spiritual Underground Railroad, because the message of love that Dignity has affirmed will already be inherent in every Catholic heart around the world. I believe that Catholics of the future will someday be unable to fathom what the Church once professed about women and LGBT people, apart from stories of the past. That day has not come. But until it does, the community that has been formed through Dignity will assure for time to come that there will always be a place to gather where all are welcomed.

Intergenerational Dialogues: a Convention Reflection

By Martin Witchger, Dignity/Washington



Author's note: The use of the description "older" in this piece is meant only in contrast to "younger" in regards to age, and for the purpose of contrast, and is not meant to be inferred as "old."

One of the many highlights for me at the DignityUSA 2013 Convention was the workshop on intergenerational dialogues put on by the Young Adult Caucus. With the realities of many of our chapters being older, but trying to reach out and re-

Continued on page 11

Intergenerational Dialogues..., continued from page 10

tain younger adults, it was a very pertinent and timely session. I was curious about this session because I know that while intergenerational dialogues are important and necessary, from experiences after Mass at my local Dignity/Washington chapter, even after almost a year of weekly Masses, as a young adult, talking with some of the older members of my Chapter has been a little awkward. But, being committed to Dignity, and wanting to push myself into this experience, I went into this session with an open heart and mind.

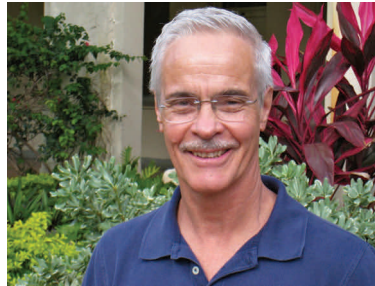
Surprisingly, the session at the Convention was a wonderful experience. After hearing from a young and older adult telling part of their coming out stories, we broke into intentionally mixed-aged groups. In these groups of 6-8, we had a chance to share our reaction to the stories we heard, and share a bit of our own story. With some minimal ground rules (namely, no questions or comments from anyone after each shares, just listen), there was some amazing sharing that occurred. I believe all were pleasantly surprised at what we learned, and what bonds we started to form from our short 30 minutes together. This shows that to get over the barrier of awkwardness or difficulty for discussion between generations, it is as simple as having intentional time set aside to have an open, honest, and respectful space to share with each other about our lives and experiences.

Thanks to this breakout session at the Convention, I am coming back to my local Dignity community with renewed energy and experience to help facilitate the space for intergenerational dialogue.

We may just be surprised what we hear. It isn't all easy for us young LGBT people coming out or living in our worlds, despite the amazing strides in LGBT rights over the last several decades. And it wasn't as difficult for some of the older adults in our community who have been out for decades. But we each have a story to tell, and hopefully, through talking with those outside our age, we will learn to better respect one another and build strong intergenerational communities at Dignity.

Reflections on Plenary Address: Claiming Our Catholic Social Justice Traditions, Maureen Fielder, SL and James Nickoloff

By James Nickoloff, Associate Professor
Emeritus of Religious Studies, College of the
Holy Cross



I was pleased to see that both Maureen Fiedler and the Dignity Convention itself began with the theme of gratitude for the gifts of many persons and for God's love, because

I have come to believe that any sound theology and any sound ethics must be rooted in thanksgiving. The Church as a whole seems to be (slowly) moving beyond the discourse of obedience and exhortation to one which begins with gratitude. I take this as an encouraging sign.

Maureen masterfully linked the struggle of LGBT persons and communities for justice to the larger struggle for the survival of life on the planet. In this regard, she voiced a serious criticism of globalized capitalism rooted in greed. I noted that the Church's critique of the absolute right to private property is not new, and I cited several excerpts from the letters of St. Ambrose of Milan (who died in 397 CE) which show this to be the case:

Earth at its beginning was for *all in common*; it was meant for rich and poor alike; what right have you to monopolize the soil? Nature knows nothing of the rich; all are poor when she brings them forth.

God created the universe in such a manner that *all in common* might derive their food from it, and that the earth should also be *a property common to all*.

Why do you reject someone who has the same rights over nature as you? It is *not* from your own goods that you give to the beggar; you are restoring to him what is already his. The earth

Continued on page 12

Reflections on Plenary..., continued from page 11

belongs to all. So you are paying back a debt
[while you] *think* you are making a gift.
(Emphasis added)

Maureen mentioned the meeting of the Latin American bishops which was held at Medellin, Colombia in 1968, following Vatican II, and which declared that the Church must enter into solidarity with the poor and the marginalized of society. I elaborated on this, pointing out that many, including liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, have come to see the Medellin conference as the authentic completion of the work of Vatican II. While Vatican II dealt extensively with two of the three goals for the Council proposed by Pope John XXIII (the Church's relationship with the modern world and the reunification of all Christian churches), the Council gave very little attention to the Pope's third concern (the challenge presented by world poverty). With its focus squarely on the poor and the Church's relationship with them, Medellin deserves a careful re-examination by Catholics today. I pointed out that Medellin also dealt with the Church's own sinfulness, a theme which should be of interest to all people seeking justice, including LGBT persons.

Finally, Maureen suggested that because the principles about human equality and non-discrimination are already part of Catholic teaching, we should not be surprised if one day the magisterium approves women's ordination and same-sex marriage by saying, "As we've always said down through the ages." I agreed and shared the story of one of my theology professors who had concluded that the Church's teaching always evolves in three stages. First, a new question arises to which the Church's magisterium must give an answer: "No, the answer is no, has always been no, and will always be no," reply the authorities. In a second step, the hierarchy decides to study the question further. And in a third step, the magisterium declares its teaching, clearly and simply: "Yes, the answer is yes, has always been yes, and will always be yes." The desire for continuity will not go away, but the development of doctrine is a fact of history.

La Frontera: Notes From a Convention Workshop

By Delfin Bautista, DignityUSA

Editor's Note: Delfin led a workshop entitled Deconstructing and Reconstructing Gender: Creating a Catholic Transgender Narrative. Below are the notes from which Delfin spoke, reprinted here as poetry.

"For the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior...she goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality. Being lesbian and raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight, I made the choice to be queer. It's an interesting path, one that continually slips in and out of the white, the Catholic, the Mexican, the indigenous, the instincts. in and out of my head. It makes for loqueria, the crazies. It is a path of knowledge--one of knowing and of learning the history of oppression of our raza. It is a way of balancing, of mitigating duality."

-Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

-Paul's letter to the Galatians 3:28-29

Balancing and mitigating duality ...

Neither Greek or Jew, neither male or female ...

many have argued that these words of Paul

Reflect the making of an emerging Christian tribe ...

who like us, was coming together in hopes of sorting out their identity

As individuals and as a community in the midst of changes in government,

Religious and cultural persecution of their beliefs that differed from the norm,

And infighting among their leaders over who could and couldn't be a Christian.

Continued on page 13

La Frontera..., continued from page 12

However, rather than engaging this surface understanding,

I want us to go deeper and query Paul's idea and use of "or"

In light of Gloria's concept of duality,
venturing that Paul was a theologian of la frontera.

His message to the Galatians is that
there is neither blank or blank,

because they are a both/and people—

a people who dwell in the borderlands identities and justice.

Like the Galatians, we too dwell in the borderland...

we are individuals who embody both

Greek and Jew, male and female, black and white ...

It's a messy inner coexistence

but the early Christian communities were onto something profoundly radical...



Dignity/Boston won the prize for most attendees at the Convention

The refusal to limit people to one label and
with that limitation impose a number of expectations that
stump wholeness and human dignity.

In my journey of trying to make sense of GOD's calling...

I have often found inspiration in biblical figures who embodied intersecting identities...

Individuals like Mary of Nazareth who was woman, prophet, apostle, and mother...

Paul, himself, who was

Greek, Jew, Roman, soldier, follower of Christ, persecutor, persecuted...

Though not a biblical character,

Gloria embodied la frontera,

or as she and others have called it the mestizaje of identities...

she was poet, activist, Chicana, Catholic, and a lesbian.

Like them, I too am a mosaic of identities... a person of the borderlands.

I am not one identity, though a label is often imposed on me

by society, the church, and the media.

I am limited to just being queer or a person of faith or Latino or a social worker,

Rather than having my whole self embraced, affirmed, and celebrated.

Despite labels and categories that seek to limit and dehumanize me,

I refuse to be boxed and type-casted into conformity and

the silence of a supposed inclusivity.

Our prophetic calling,

the radicalness of Paul's message and of Gloria's duality,

is to have all our identities interact, fight, and coexist...

to live into and be a frontera, a borderland.

I believe that Paul and the early Christian communities

were not advocating for differences and particularities to be quelled or

melted into an amorphous blob of gook.

Rather, it is invitation to unity, both internal and tribal,

based on the celebration of differences,

A lifting up of the borders within and among us.

It is a call for us here now to bring to the Eucharistic table,

Continued on page 14

La Frontera..., continued from page 13

the classroom, our social and cultural circles, to civil society

all of who we are as individuals, as tribes, as communities--

recognizing our multifaceted nature, our complexities, and our richness.

It is an invitation to challenge ourselves to perhaps rethink how we gather in groups...

Living through the tensions of creating and respecting the need for safe spaces

for young adults, women, people of color, and trans-identified individuals

while also being mindful that while Delfin may claim our trans identity,

We too are also a young adult and latino...

can there be spaces that affirm all of me and all of us?

The border is more than just the division between the US and Mexico,

Haiti and the Dominican Republic,

Android and Apple,

Conservative Catholic and Progressive Catholic ...

Racial and gender categories...

It is more than the lines separating our religious traditions.

Boundaries are places of encounter.

We are conditioned, however, to be fearful of difference,

To water down our identities and all that makes us unique.

We are brainwashed into wanting the same car,

hairstyle, white picket fence, apps for our smart phones,

and unhealthy notions of body ...

our quirks are blow dried, straightened, dyed, lyposuctioned and botoxed...

We are coerced by the media, the education system, and by the Church

To erase borders and to blur la frontera --

to uphold false notions of inclusivity that in reality painfully exclude,

marginalize, and oppress those who

believe that "Kum ba yah" is more than just a melting pot

but a yearning for conflict and tension in harmony.

We are not the same, that's okay ... I thank GOD we are not the same.

borders and boundaries are not places of problematic divisiveness,

But sanctuaries of encounter, to cross over and be with the other,

to have the other cross over and be with us.

As a familia or as a community seeking to create the Kingdom of God,

Through our differences, we are united by our common passion for equality

and together flow down the river of justice.

As poet and prophet Dr. Maya Angelou puts it,

We are each a rainbow in each other's clouds.

As we dwell in the borderlands within us and among us,

We must remember that we are not alone but that we journey together—

Where you go, I go....where I go, you go...

We dwell in the borderland in the company of witnesses who have gone before us

and witnesses with us now...

challenging and being challenged to embrace our wholeness.

if we look to Scripture,

We discover a GOD who is at times contradictory and even snarky.

But it is this GOD...the GOD of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...

The GOD praised in the Psalms...

the GOD who smited and who also heard the cries of Her people...

the GOD whom Jesus called Abba...

It is this GOD who lovingly created us, graced us, blessed us as good...

Not just select pieces of us, but the whole person

Continued on page 15

La Frontera...., continued from page 14

with all our

quirks, contradictions, bloopers, passions, and gifts.

We are created in the image of a GOD who like us is

An embodied mosaic of interlocking, interacting, interfering identities.

Going beyond the "or" of Paul and becoming the "both/and" of Gloria is not easy,

Especially when our frontera is filled with clashing identities.

However, it can be a fun enlightening mess of confusion and whole-izing holiness.

When we dwell in the borderland,

We are invited to experiment, get messy, take risks, pursue chances.

As Chicana Poet and Lesbian Activist describes it, to live in the borderlands means to put chile in the borscht, eat whole wheat tortillas, speak tex-mex with a brooklyn accent; to survive and thrive in the borderlands you must live sin fronteras, be a crossroads.

We are called to embrace our fronteras



Convention attendees watch fireworks on July 4

Not with fear and dominance,

But with humility and gusto.

Jesus was an immigrant and exilee and prophet of inclusivity...

born into poverty, He was a son, teacher, carpenter, Jew,

student, rabbi, friend, lover, savior, healer, radical...

A person trying to survive political, religious, and cultural upheavals...

It was the interacting and interfering of all of this that

helped Jesus understand His calling—

He did not deny who he was or where he was from,

Rather he allowed all of it to come together...

the miracles, the sermons, the crowds on the mount, the parables,

the times in the desert, the work in the carpentry shop,

the repetitions of stories to disciples who just didn't seem to get it,

The coming together of divine and human at the transfiguration,



Band members treated attendees to live music

The cross and the resurrection....

All of it together, messy, challenging, freeing, a borderland...

throughout His ministry Jesus patiently, lovingly,

helped the ragtag group of misfits who followed him dwell in la frontera..

Jesus showed them how to come into their own by embracing their own borderlands of

fishermen, shepherds, zealots, tax collectors, people on the fringe...

Like Jesus, like Paul, like all those we turn to for inspiration,

Continued on page 16

La Frontera..., continued from page 15

we are called to celebrate the fronteras within us and among us.

To dwell in the borderlands is to flow and ripple like a river of justice...
It is how this trans-identified, Hispanic, flat footed, chunky and funky,

social worker who savors transgressive theologies

Is able to embrace the call and invitation of intersectional justice...

As we dwell and journey in the borderlands within us and among us,



Dignity/New York's flash mob during the Convention

We are all called to live the prophetic life of the frontera...

to give birth to the Divine in our words, deeds, hearts, thoughts, and lives ...

an invitation to be our whole selves and to help others live authentically whole.

As we embrace our many identities,

Like Jesus, like Paul, like the Galatians, like Gloria, like the GOD who created us,

we are no longer made to feel ashamed for existing...

we will rant our voices, dance our dances, pray our prayers,

it will be loud and messy,

but it will proclaim the wonders and dynamism of GOD and of all of creation.

As we dwell in the frontera,

Will we let it be done to us according to the radical and inclusive word of GOD?

How have we responded?

How are we responding?

How will we respond?

To GOD's call and invitation to

embody the sacredness of the borders within us and among us?

May it be done to us according to GOD's living, organic,

evolving, revolutionary, transfiguring, harmoniously tense, both/and-ed Word.

bendiciones en su lucha y en su caminar...Blessed be...Amen.



Co-presiders led Convention attendees during Mass



Two members of Dignity/San Antonio during Opening Ceremonies

Holy Tears

By Greg Wadsworth, Dignity/Buffalo



It is not widely known that Dignity Conventions are filled with weeping. I have always been reticent to discuss the rampant crying at the Convention out of fear it will be misunderstood. Western cultures have a very old taboo against public crying. That taboo is so strong that typically the only public tears we encounter are associated with emotional distress or the greatest of physical pain. When encountering someone in tears we feel called to relieve the pain and stop the crying. If we cannot relieve the pain, we do our best to empathize and share in the suffering. If that were what Convention tears were about, than most of us would skip the weekend and hope that the appropriate ministers and health care professionals would be called in. However, that is not the nature of Convention tears.

There is a special grace that lifts the taboo against crying during the Convention. With the taboo lifted, crying can be associated with many different emotions. My sense is that up to 10% of the Conventioneers weep at some point in the weekend. Most notorious is our famed Executive Director, Marianne Duddy-Burke, who cries on and off from the opening to the closing ceremonies. She feigns a bit of embarrassment when the tears start flowing, but it becomes clear very quickly her tears are not about suffering. Her acceptance of her own tears reassures everyone that crying is a natural response to our gathering. These tears have always been a part of Dignity's Conventions and hopefully always will be.

If the convention tears are not about emotional distress or physical pain, what is their cause? The weeping is not random but is a shared experience. Much of the weeping takes place during the singing of hymns. The hymns themselves are not the cause. They are very familiar hymns that we sing at our home parishes without any tears. What is it about these sung prayers that generate the tears in these special gatherings?

Western societies did not always have a taboo against public crying. The Church fathers and saints of the first millennium described weeping as a common and worthy experience of the faithful. The tears were most closely associated with prayer. The medieval Church developed elaborate theories which described at least four types of prayerful tears: tears of sorrow, tears of gladness, tears of contrition, and tears of grace. This ancient Catholic framework can be used to reflect on the tears at the Convention. (If the Catholic framework fails, Muslims also have a well-developed theology of weeping we might turn to.)

I believe we can rule out the first two types of tearful prayers: those of sorrow and gladness. I suspect all of us have experienced tears of sorrow. Our Jewish brothers and sisters have perfected these prayers of tears in the liturgical chanting of the Book of Lamentations. In my personal experience, I remember my strong desire to attend Mass was on the evening of the tragedy of September 11. Those emotions had to be shared with God. It was the only way to cope with the sorrow of the day. That type of sorrow has nothing to do with the weeping at the Convention. There may be moments of sweet sorrow during the convention, but we have not gathered to mourn.

I don't think the Convention tears are prayers of gladness, although there is much gladness and joy in the weekend. What type of gladness brings us to tears? The tears of a lottery winner come close; certainly there is gladness, but I am not sure it is prayerful. A better example of tears of gladness may be the tears shed at a wedding. A wedding brings a special gladness and joy where our friends have asked us to witness their sacred vows of commitment. There are undoubtedly tears of gladness shared at Dignity Con-

Continued on page 18

Holy Tears, continued from page 17

ventions, but I don't think it explains the 10% who weep singing familiar old hymns.

Tears of contrition – those are more complicated. A Dignity Convention is a room full of Catholics who are well practiced at prayers of contrition. I heard someone credit our Convention tears to gay angst. I see the sense of that. It is a room full of LGBT people. Undoubtedly, some of those present have felt their share of that angst. A case can be made that contrition is a traditional Catholic response to angst.

Recently in the Gospel reading at Mass we heard what might be the most cited example of a silent, tearful prayerful of contrition. It is story of the woman of the city who crashed a dinner party and washed the feet of Christ with her tear soaked hair. When the Pharisees murmured of the scandal caused by a woman touching Jesus, Jesus came to her defense and chastised his host. Christ said to his host, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss my feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil, but this woman has anointed my feet with fragrant oil." Then Christ said to the women, "Your sins are forgiven; your faith has saved you; go in peace."

It is reasonable to suppose that this woman's tears were tears of contrition. The gospel does say that her community considered her a sinner. Her reputation of sinfulness contributed to the concern of the Pharisees. And at the end of the story, Christ explicitly forgives her sins. I can recall a homily or two that emphasized that part of the story. The take-home message was that if our own contrition were as authentic as this tearful woman's, we too might have our sins forgiven.

However, it is possible that this woman of the city was not crying tears of contrition but was shedding what St. Gregory the Great called "gratia lacrimarum," or, "tears of grace." Maybe she was not crying because of her great sinfulness; maybe she was crying because she understood that Jesus

was the Living God. She understood that the world she previously thought full of shame and loss was instead a world of Love. Her authentic response to Love Incarnate was the same as the many saints who shed copious tears during their mystical encounters with Christ.

I would like to think it is tears of grace that are shed at Dignity Conventions. Christ, who promised to be present wherever two or three are gathered, is present in a special way at the gathering of his LGBT faithful. The grace is palpable. Those old familiar hymns resonate in a new way in our souls while the whole community responds to that grace in great joy. For about 10% of us, our authentic response to the presence of the Living God involves tears. This weeping is a special blessing. The tears are like the tears of grace shed by St. Louis which he found "delectable and comforting, not only to the heart but to the tongue."

I do not go to Dignity Conventions to cry. The weekends are rich experiences where I encounter the Living God in a remarkable group of men and women, where I am strengthened in my faith, and from where I return to Buffalo renewed in my commitment to the Church. The tears do bring their own pleasure but they are a small part of the Conventions. But if the tears ever dry up, I will miss them.



No tears for this group! L to R: Delfin Bautista, Jim Smith, and Paul Scarbrough

More Convetion Moments



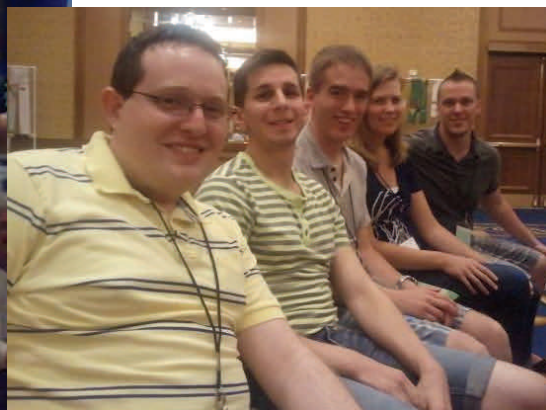
Jane Powers and Kathy Ann Gianino



Leo Tisbar, Jim Morris, and Jeff Stone



Dinner and dancing during the Convention



Dignity's Young Adult Caucus had a strong presence at the Convention



Lourdes Rodriguez-Nogues



World Youth Day pilgrims Lauren Carpenter and Delfin Bautista receive a blessing for their mission during the Eucharistic liturgy

Thank You!

The DignityUSA Editors wish to extend a special thanks to Paul Keaveney and Peggy Burns for their tireless and thorough proofreading of each and every QV and Dateline. Without your skilled eye, our publications would not shine nearly as bright.

You are much appreciated.



Thank you to Paula Lavallee, Mark Matson, and Linda Pieczynski, who step down from the DignityUSA board at the end of September.

All have served with distinction and grace, and each is moving on to a new role within DignityUSA.

Like what you read and want to be there next time?

You can preregister for the DignityUSA 22nd National Convention at <https://www.dignityusa.org/civicrm/event/info?id=48&reset=1>



From any vantage point in Seattle, one can see mountains, water, or both. It's like the surround sound of God's glory. This combination of mountains and water makes Seattle unique and defines its character.

Whenever one sees the brilliance of a sunrise illuminating Mt. Rainier and the Cascade Mountains or the sun setting behind the Olympic Mountains, casting its beauty over Puget Sound, the awe of God's creation shines through. And in the vastness of God's handiwork, it draws one inward to focus on an intimate, personal relationship with God. The moment becomes very spiritual and keeps one grounded in one's faith.

As Christians we are called to love as Jesus loved. But as humans, we sometimes falter and need a boost. Building a relationship with God and cultivating our spiritual life deepens our faith and reveals the enormity of God's enduring and endless love.