

The Independence

The Newsletter of Dignity/Philadelphia for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Catholics & Friends

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Dignity Philadelphia from Home



COVID-19 has changed so much in our lives. This global pandemic has kept us physically separate in order to stay healthy, but it's also offered us the opportunity to connect in with friends who have moved far afield. Our last in-person service was on Sunday, March 8th. Since then, we've gathered online to worship together in new ways. At first, we created our own prayer services. Since July, we've been blessed to welcome back our presidors, so we may receive the eucharist, as well as our musicians, so that we may praise God with music.

Throughout this pandemic, we have done what a community does – look out for one another. From helping fellow Dignity members figure out their computer setups so we can see their faces to checking in on each other to ensure members have access to groceries, we have extended a hand and loved each other as God loves us. Later in the newsletter, you will hear from Dignity Philadelphia members about how they've been doing during COVID-19 social distancing and how attending Dignity services online has impacted them during this time.

As we learn to adapt to our 'new normal,' we will continue to find ways of staying connected as a community. In the last two months, some Dignity members have gathered in Louis Kahn Park for socially-distanced, outdoor gatherings. As we head into winter, with cooler temperatures forcing us to stay indoors and with the unknown outcome of an election upon which democracy hangs, we will continue to be there for one another.

Kate Huffman, Dignity Philadelphia *Independence* Editor



Virtual Hugs,
Stop the Bugs!

**Motions from the Board of Directors Meetings
in September 2020**

Motion #09-20-01 made by Jimmy Calnan; seconded by Kevin Davies. Be it moved that the following be appointed to retroactive two-year terms on the Board to end on May 31, 2022: Kaeden Thompson, Michael Rocks and Rob Baker. Passed unanimously.

Motion #09-20-02 made by Jimmy Calnan; seconded by Kaeden Thompson. Be it moved that the Ad Hoc Audit Committee for fiscal year 9/1/2019 to 8/31/2020 consist of Mike Viola and Mark Stevens. Passed unanimously.

Motion #09-20-03 made by Michael Rocks; seconded by Kevin Davies. Be it moved that Dignity Philadelphia issue the following statement regarding the use of David Haas' music. In recent weeks, allegations of sexual offenses and spiritual manipulation have been brought against musical composer, David Haas. Several women have come forward accusing the composer of engaging in inappropriate conduct with them in the 1980s. As a result, the Board of Dignity Philadelphia has decided to immediately cease the use of any music and songs composed by David Haas. We have made this decision in order to stand in solidarity with victims of sexual harassment, abuse and assault. Dignity Philadelphia has always aimed to create a safe and inclusive worship environment for all, often emerging as a leader in combatting the social justice issues of our time. During a time when it can often be difficult to distinguish fact from fiction, this action firmly states the importance of believing survivors of sexual harassment. Throughout the world, some have pointed out that Mr. Haas has apologized for his conduct and that as Christians we should be willing to forgive. We know that ultimately only God can judge humans and the true intentions of our hearts. However, it is not our place to accept or decline this apology, as we are not the victims of this violence. Where we can take action is by affirming that our community of faith is not tolerant of this kind of behavior. Through our commitment to protect and uplift one another, we can create an environment where sexual harassment and abuse no longer exist. Passed unanimously.



**Photos from Outdoor Dignity Philadelphia
Social Gatherings**



Dolores V., Lulu, & Michelle P.



Left to right: Patrick, Dick, Jimmy Calnan, Robert B., Rob, Ray, and in the front seats, Michael Rocks, Michelle and Lulu.

Happy Birthday!

Michael Viola – May 1, Kaeden Thompson – May 12,
Phil Cohen – June 15, Kate Huffman – August 30,
Henry Chau – October 1, Joe Chudzinski – October 2,
Kathleen Schuck – October 3

Upcoming Birthday nights: Oct 18, Nov 15 & Dec 20

Did we miss your birthday or have one coming up in November or December? Email Kate at kate.huffman93@gmail.com to be included in the next newsletter.

Dignity Philadelphia President's Report by Michael J. Rocks

After I met with the Archbishop of Philadelphia (AOP) on June 24, 2020 I wrote an account of what transpired during that meeting without comment and sent it via E Blast to the members. At this point I want to make three comments about the meeting in the areas of – Homophobia, Ignorance and Clericalism.

Homophobia can be defined as fear of homosexuality itself, as fear of homosexual people themselves, as fear of acknowledging one's own homosexual orientation, or as fear of being perceived as a homosexual person. I am not sure which of these categories to place AOP but he surely meets the criteria for at least one of them. In other words, AOP is a homophobe. It became clear to me when I mentioned the attack on Archbishop Wilton Gregory, Archbishop of Washington DC, by the ultraconservative and historically vile Church Militant organization. The right-wing Catholic group attacked Archbishop Gregory as "a homosexual and a Marxist" and demonized him (as well as the late Cardinal Bernardin) by publicizing hateful commentary about Archbishop Gregory and other American bishops who have shown some kind of positive support for LGBT Roman Catholics and for LGBT ministry in the Church. AOP did not show one iota of sympathy or support for his brother Archbishop. It was then clear to me that AOP feared being associated in any positive way with LGBT Catholics. Which categories of "homophobia" the AOP falls under, I am not sure. Still I am quite sure that homophobia is the reason why AOP avoided any notion that he was supportive of anything positive involving LGBT Catholics.

Ignorant (as a word) came into my vocabulary as a small child in the Baltimore Catechism question – What are the Spiritual Works of Mercy? The first is "Instruct the ignorant". Ignorant is defined as "lacking knowledge, information or awareness about a particular thing". I can say with confidence that AOP is ignorant regarding the teachings of Pope Francis regarding welcoming all Roman Catholics into the daily life of Christ's Church, including LGBT Catholics, divorced and remarried Catholics, and unmarried heterosexual Catholics who live together. From the outset, I addressed the AOP in a letter outlining my request to begin a dialogue with the local Catholic leadership in the Spirit of "Amoris Laetitia" (The Joy of Love) and "Evangelii Gaudium" (The Joy of the Gospel). Both documents are Apostolic Exhortations which are reports by the Pope regarding the Church Synods which were held early in the papacy of Francis. I opened my meeting with AOP introducing the possibility of dialogue as outlined very specifically by Pope Francis, particularly Amoris Laetitia. After my first go the AOP responded "I didn't get that memo". So I took a second go, talking more specifically about Pope Francis' admission that he was not changing Church teaching but rather was advising Bishops to open the doors of the local Churches to welcoming the "exiled" regardless of Church teachings. Francis was speaking more about pastoral changes in the way these "exiled" Catholics were to be welcomed regardless of the state of their sexual orientation or status of marriage. Again, AOP said "If the Church's teaching has changed, I didn't get that memo". Without saying it out loud I thought "the memo is Amoris Laetitia". Then I kept wondering if AOP really had read, understood and accepted Pope Francis' guidance. So I went in for a third time, "instructing the ignorant" about the documents. AOP had reportedly expressed his "love" of the documents directly to the Pope himself. AOP's appointment to Philadelphia presumed his support for the Pope's teachings. Same response, "if Church teaching has changed I didn't that that memo." When I was a child in Catholic School if I kept showing my ignorance, Sister would have called me a "smart aleck". Then I realized that AOP is either simply not familiar with the Apostolic Exhortations and does not know the content and intent of the Exhortations, or AOP does not agree with the Pope's guidance and does not intend to implement Amoris Laetitia in the spirit of Francis in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. AOP fits well the meaning of "Ignorant", in both the worst sense and the best sense of the word.

Clericalism is defined as "the application of the formal, church-based leadership or opinion of ordained clergy in matter of either the Church or broader political and sociocultural import." Pope Francis has identified "clericalism" as one of the main problems facing the present-day Catholic Church. Francis has attacked clericalism time and time again to Cardinals, Bishops, Priests and even Deacons in his writings and speeches. Pope Francis identifies "clericalism" as a disordered attitude toward holding all the power and as an assumption of the moral superiority of Roman Catholic clergy. The Catholic News Service reported that "throughout his pontificate, Pope Francis has targeted clericalism as an illness in the Church, an ailment that pretends 'the Church' means 'priests and bishops' that ignores or minimizes the God-given grace and talents of laypeople and that emphasized the authority of clerics over their obligation of service." AOP seems determined to continue the policies of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia which is considered one of the hotbeds of clericalism in the American Church.

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It seems to me that AOP is more interested in pleasing the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and its homophobic agenda of "clericalism" than he is interested in listening to the advice of the Pope who appointed him AOP. Like his predecessor, the present AOP will use his crozier (the Shepherd's staff he carries) to block the door of the Catholic Church to LGBT Roman Catholics. The AOP perverts the true symbolism of the Shepherd's staff by making it a weapon of exclusion instead of a symbol of inclusion of all the sheep. Perhaps he is a wolf in Shepherd's clothing.

The meeting was not a waste of time in the sense of the Little Prince who said "it is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important." In the end I cling with hope to the words of Saint Teresa of Avila, "Let nothing frighten you. All things are passing away: God never changes. Patience obtains all things." We are the Church and will always be the Church. We must be our own Shepherd. And we are used to that.

I have missed coming to Dignity and have not come in close to ten years. Moving to New Jersey has presented some challenges for me. But I am glad at being back at least via video. It's good to see some familiar faces.

Still working full time in children's system of care in NJ/Camden County plus private practice and in prisons and halfway house system. Life has been good for me and about to start transition process from full time work to just the part time stuff. Wanting and needing some time to myself and family. Have continued to travel to Ireland to see family and close friends. I am supposed to go for the month of March to live in a pilot house off the River Derry but with the virus might have to postpone that for a year. About two years ago had both knees replaced in one operation and made great recovery and walking normally. For about two years before the operation, had to walk with crutches to get around and that limited my time away from home and work. But now doing much better.

Have kept in contact with Doug Heybour and some communication with Russ Clarke, Russ's two boys are now adult with the youngest one married with children. Russ moved back to the west coast but moved back to Reading area once his son get married. Other son lives in CA area still trying in the movie business, the tech aspects of that trade. Doug is a certified early childhood specialist working with four year old in Chicago area living around his twin brother and other family members.

Again, glad to be back. – **Charlie Graham**

COVID-19 Stories from Dignity Philadelphia
Members

In reply to the request that I write a few words about myself since the start of the pandemic here and the end of on-site masses at Dignity--I have been well.

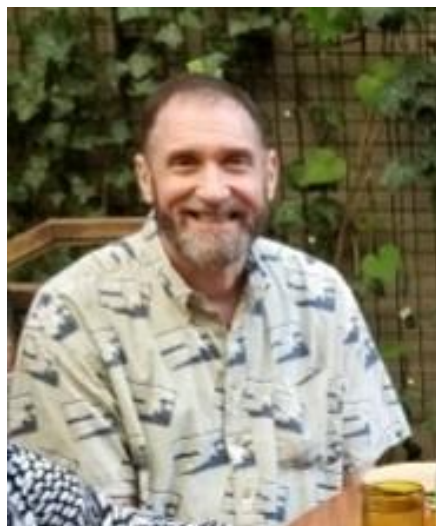
Although I had the coronavirus in early May, I had few symptoms and I recovered very well, I would say, over the 2 or 3 weeks following infection.

Certainly, these past months of spring and summer have been different from anything I have ever known before or ever wanted to know.

Work has continued remotely; it has gone well, mostly, but with some limitations I have been able to fill my free time productively with some reading, gardening and home improvement. I am grateful that all these have been possible.

I had the chance, just once, to see some Dignity members one warm Wednesday some month or more ago and I was able to get together recently with some friends from WWCC for an outdoor meal.

After only online and telephone togetherness for months with those I know, it seems to me almost a strange and distant event when I will finally see others in person at the places I go to – but it is one I look forward to always. – **Robert Bodnar**



Robert Bodnar

I always display some kind of banner on my porch year-round. I have quite a collection. This year on Gay Pride Day I displayed the Rainbow Phillies Flag that was the giveaway at last year's Phillies Gay Community Night. The lesbian family that lives two doors up made a point of telling me it was great to see that flag. The guy across the street yelled across and asked where I got that Phillies Flag since he had never seen one like that before. I yelled back that I got it from the Phillies on Gay Community Night. "Oh" he said, "my friend said he never saw a Phillies flag like that before". By the way I have my black mask pulled down for the photo. Everyone says it looks like I have a beard.. – **Michael Rocks**



Prayer Intentions



As in-person Mass is currently suspended due to COVID-19, commonly referred to as Coronavirus, please email your prayer requests to Kevin at kevin_davies69@hotmail.com.

Derek and I have made home our place of refuge during the pandemic. Derek is one of the lucky people still to have a job, but he takes every precaution available. Our evening meal together is sacred to us, whether it be at 5 PM or 11 PM, depending on his work schedule.

For my part, I am consoled that I can prepare a weekly prayer of the faithful for the Dignity zoom Liturgy. I feel united in prayer with everyone with my daily meditations and reading the scriptures.

Blessings for you and your loved ones, Peace, **Norm**



Life during this pandemic for me has been filled with blessings and challenges. I am grateful to reconnect with my Dignity Philadelphia Family through virtual mass while living now in Boston since 2018. Our liturgies have brought us together to offer prayer, hope and support for each other during this difficult time. It has been a tremendous source of strength for me as we come together to share our faith. – **Barbara Gindhart**

"One of the truest tests of integrity is its blunt refusal to be compromised." – **Chinua Achebe**

God of decency,
That evil which benefits us will always be tempting. We are tempted by security, status, image, greed, and inclusion each day. We confess we make little compromises to what we believe to be true and right, convincing our souls that we will compensate in other ways. Lord, grant us that same stability of heart and selfhood that you possessed in the desert. That we would meet the allure of systemic injustice and oppression and unhealthy distributions of power with a blunt refusal to be compromised. Restore to us an integrity held by a God who didn't politely ask how much the tables cost before flipping them. Amplify those voices who are willing to blow the whistle, to tell the truth despite the cost, knowing that the image of God is worthy of a costly protection.

@blackliturgies

Make sure to VOTE!



This election may be the most important in our lifetime – LGBT rights, civil rights, women’s rights, and so much more are all on the line. Make sure you have a plan to vote – either by mail, early in person, or on November 3rd.

If you need a ride to the polls on Election Day, email Kate at kate.huffman93@gmail.com.

- ✓ Request your mail-in ballot online at <https://www.votespa.com/Voting-in-PA/Pages/Mail-and-Absentee-Ballot.aspx>
- ✓ Find an early voting location near you online at <https://www.inquirer.com/politics/election/philadelphia-early-voting-locations-2020-election-20200918.html>
- ✓ Find out more about early voting online at <https://www.votespa.com/Voting-in-PA/Pages/Early-Voting.aspx>
- ✓ Make a plan to vote & be safe!

Support Dignity Philadelphia

Dignity Philadelphia is a caring, supportive community of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender Catholics, our families and friends. Dignity Philadelphia is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that operates based on the generosity of member and supporter donations. If you would like to donate to Dignity Philadelphia, please see the information at the bottom of the newsletter to mail in a cash or check.

You may also donate online at <https://www.mightycause.com/donate/Dignity-Philadelphia>



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An Update on Board Elections

Elections for the Board of Directions were originally scheduled to take place on May 24th. However, COVID-19 prevented us from gathering in person and from conducting a proper election.

The terms of three board members were scheduled to expire on May 31, 2020. The seats up for election were the seats held by Michael Rocks, Rob Baker and Joe Orr. The Board of Directors decided to extend the terms of Michael Rocks and Rob Baker until November 30, 2020 and also appointed Kaeden Thompson to an interim term beginning June 1, 2020 until November 30, 2020. The plan was to have an election sometime prior to the end of November. As fate would have it, the Chapter was still not able to conduct a proper election and faced the dilemma of the expiration of these “interim” appointments without being able to conduct a proper election.

The By Laws of Dignity Philadelphia give the Board of Directors the power to appoint members to fill positions on the Board that become vacant for any reason. Our By Laws also afford the Board members the rights outlined in Robert’s Rules of Order. With this knowledge, the Board retroactively appointed three members to full two-year terms expiring May 31, 2022. The Board appointed Rob Baker, Kaeden Thompson and Michael Rocks to full two-year terms. The Board decided that Michael Rocks should remain in the position of President, and although Michael was looking forward to taking a break from the Board of Directors, he graciously accepted the new appointment for the sake of continuity in leadership during a crisis.

Board of Directors

Michael Rocks - Director, President of the Board
Jimmy Calnan - Director, Membership
Kevin Davies - Director, Record Keeping
Rob Baker - Director, Finances
Kaeden Thompson - Director, At Large

Service Groups

Dick O’Malley & Jim Clay - Liturgical Service Group Coordinators
Kate Huffman & Kaeden Thompson - Communications Service Group

BECOME A DIGNITY PHILADELPHIA MEMBER

A community of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Catholics, our Families and Friends

Yes, I want to be a member of the Dignity family!

I am joining as a new member I am renewing my membership Address Change

Name(s): _____

Mailing Address: _____

Preferred Phone Numbers: _____

Email address: _____

Please provide your email address to receive Dignity Philadelphia's newsletter *The Independence* and the latest news via email blasts. Your support through your dues to DignityUSA will entitle you to voting privileges in national elections, subscriptions to the monthly Dateline and Quarterly Voice, discounted registration for biennial conventions and other DignityUSA events; and access to Dignity News email list and chat groups.

Individual Annual Dues:	Couple's Annual Dues:
Dignity Philadelphia - \$20 DignityUSA - \$60 (Optional)	Dignity Philadelphia - \$35 DignityUSA \$120 (Optional)
\$_____ Total	\$_____ Total

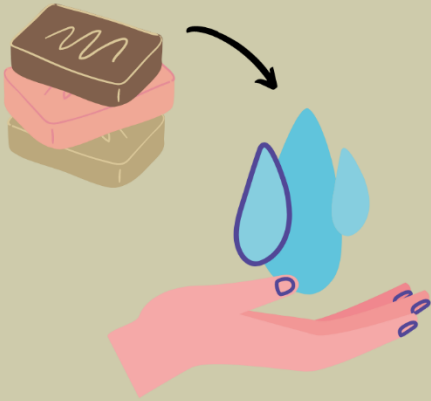
Scholarships are available for Dignity Philadelphia and DignityUSA memberships. Contact the Dignity Director of Membership for more information at dignityphila@aol.com.

Please enclose your check, payable to Dignity/Philadelphia, and mail to:
Dignity/Philadelphia, P.O. Box 53348, Philadelphia, PA 19105

Electronic payment at <https://www.mightycause.com/donate/Dignity-Philadelphia>

The total amount of your dues and donations to both Dignity Philadelphia and DignityUSA may be included in one check. We will forward your DignityUSA dues/donations and your contact information to the DignityUSA national office.

A GUIDE TO MASK USE



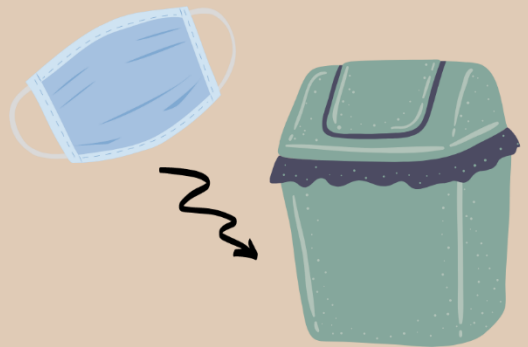
Before putting on a mask, clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.



Cover mouth and nose with mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask.



Replace the mask with a new one as soon as it is damp and do not re-use single-use masks.



To remove the mask: remove it from behind (do not touch the front of mask); discard immediately in a closed bin; clean hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.