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DignityUSA conference gave inspiring focus to justice

Maureen Fiedler | Jul. 10, 2013 NCR Today

I have just returned from the 2013 DignityUSA conference in Minneapolis. The theme this year was "Let Justice Roll Like a River."

DignityUSA is the organization of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Catholics. Its members are both deeply Catholic and, of course, very concerned about justice in the church and civil society for LGBT people. In the two or three times that I have been at a DignityUSA conference, I have always found what can only be described as a palpable sense of prayer and spirituality. The same spirit pervaded Minneapolis.

This year, the planners clearly wanted members to connect the quest for LGBT justice and other struggles for justice. Thus, I was invited to keynote the conference by speaking on the social teaching of the church, raising themes of economic justice, world peace, nondiscrimination, the rights of immigrants, gender equality and respect for Earth.

Jaime Manson (of *NCR* fame!) gave a marvelous address on the "intersections of justice." The idea is that issues of justice cannot be separated; they must "roll down like a mighty stream." She joined everyone at the conference in cheering the Supreme Court decisions overturning DOMA and Prop 8 in California. But she said she did so with a heavy heart because of the SCOTUS decision the day before that gutted a key provision of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. She praised DignityUSA groups in Minnesota who realized in November they had to oppose not just an amendment to their state constitution that would have banned same-sex marriage but another amendment also on the ballot restricting voting rights. For the record, both amendments lost, a victory for justice.

She made a strong case linking the struggle for women's rights with LGBT rights, saying that straight male-power attitudes toward both groups are linked. Linda Pieczynski and Leo Egashira led a workshop on Misogyny and Homophobia, expanding further on this link. They noted that opposition to same-sex marriage among the U.S. bishops is based on the fact that gay and lesbian relationships cannot result in procreation. This, she noted, is also the reason behind the bishops' opposition to contraceptives. She said LGBT people should be united in the struggle to develop teaching that says that it's OK to have sex out of pure love and the desire for union without seeking to produce children.

The intersection of justice issues: a powerful theme indeed.

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