



Deep Faith. Courageous Spirit. Action for Justice.

March 30, 2020

Archbishop Allen Vigneron
12 State St.
Detroit, MI 48226-1823

Your Excellency:

The Peace of Christ!

On behalf of the Leadership Council of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I write to you to express our deep sadness and disappointment at your decision to forbid a Mass for the Dignity Detroit community within the Archdiocese of Detroit. For over twenty years, Dignity Detroit has been able to worship in Sacred Heart Chapel on the Marygrove campus. While the college has closed, Dignity Detroit has a five-year lease with the Marygrove Conservancy. After much discernment, we, the IHM sisters had hoped that this lease would allow Dignity the opportunity to gather as a community.

The goals of Dignity Detroit are to provide spiritual development, education, community involvement and fellowship for the members. The organization acknowledges the teachings of the Church and does not, as cited in Bishop Battersby's communication, reject some of the Church's teachings on sexual morality. We would also note that when our sisters attend liturgy at any of the parish churches in the Diocese, we worship with all gathered, unaware as to whether they accept or reject any of the teachings of our Church. To us it seems deeply unfair to single out Dignity Detroit in this way.

We understand the support of the Archdiocese for the Courage and Encourage apostolates. This is a support group that is based on the 12-step program focused on chastity, which is helpful to some individuals. It does not, however, provide the breadth of outreach to other Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender individuals. Courage and Encourage focuses almost exclusively on chastity and not on the myriad other mental, emotional and spiritual challenges that our LGBT brothers and sisters face. This pastoral strategy seems to imply that being an LGBT person is an addiction or that such a person suffers from a moral defect. Dignity is far more expansive in its pastoral approach. In your efforts of evangelization to reach

various groups of people on the margins, we do not understand why you would exclude this group of the faithful who desire to celebrate the Eucharist together.

We IHM sisters, following the practice of the Leadership Council of Women Religious, have grounded all that we do in a contemplative approach. We practice a form of discernment, grounding our decisions in contemplative dialogue to hear one another, understand each other's perspective, and grow into mutual understanding.

As a way forward, in the name of our IHM Congregation, I invite you and other representatives of the clergy and laity of your choosing to gather with us for contemplative dialogue around this important ministry to our LGBTQ sisters and brothers who are suffering because of your decisions in their regard. To our mind, this is the group that we should be taking steps to include, not exclude, from our church in which they wish to continue in community. Also, at some time in the future, it is our intent as women religious to gather with members of Dignity Detroit to worship at the Cathedral. By doing so, we hope to express our solidarity with those, who at this time, are feeling alienated from our Church.

This is a difficult time for our global community as we experience the COVID-19 pandemic. In due time, we look forward to when we can meet with you for a conversation, grounded in the practice of contemplative dialogue. Also, we look forward to gathering with our Dignity Detroit LGBT sisters and brothers and their family members in worship with you at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament.

Please know of our prayerful support for you and other leaders of our church and society at this difficult time.

Sincerely,



Mary Jane Herb, IHM, PhD
President, Sisters
Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

CC: Bishop Battersby
Mr. Frank Damore