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On Catholic Hill

The Clash of Dogma and Ministry

In 1978, two factors encouraged Norm DeNeal and Bert Bokern to take what by then seemed a fairly ordinary step: coming out, in public, through a newspaper interview. First, David Estes's campaign to repeal the gay civil rights laws in Seattle had pressured gays and lesbians to become more visible to their neighbors. Second—and for DeNeal and Bokern this would be the more significant factor—waves of change had begun to occur in the Catholic Church, to which both belonged.

DeNeal had studied philosophy and theology at Gonzaga University in eastern Washington, a school operated by the Society of Jesus—the black-robed Jesuits. After graduating, DeNeal had begun volunteering at the Seattle Counseling Service's new home on Capitol Hill, changing his identity from that of a closeted homosexual to that of a very open, articulate gay man. Bokern had discovered his feelings for men in high school and confirmed them during his Peace Corps work. In 1978, both were members of a group in Seattle then six years old, Catholics who had affiliated with a national organization called Dignity whose purpose was both social and religious. Dignity provided a way for gay men and lesbians to meet one another and to share experiences of faith, as well as to seek a more visible role within the religious conversation.

DeNeal and Bokern idealized social justice; their volunteering showed that. As had many other young Catholics in the 1970s, they embraced the revolution that Pope John XXIII's Vatican II conferences of the 1960s had slowly begun to make in the Catholic Church. Now, there was more concern for the poor, more critical reflection on past dogmas, more emphasis on the church working as a community rather than as a hierarchy. In particular, the Jesuits, so often described as the pope's "shock troops" of education, had started to shift their understanding of their own mission—it was no longer so much to teach dogma and to convert others to Catholic doctrine as to minister for changes in unjust political or social institutions.

In March 1978, DeNeal and Bokern agreed to a lengthy interview with the archdiocesan newspaper for western Washington, the *Northwest Progress,* which was ready to publish a series of educational articles about the Catholic Church's stance on homosexuality. That was because the summer before, in 1977, Archbishop

Raymond Hunthausen had made a controversial decision to recognize Mayor Wes Uhlman's proclamation of a Gay Pride Week in Seattle. While Hunthausen had not gone so far as to embrace the phrase "gay pride" himself, he had termed the occasion a "special week to call our attention to the injustices suffered by many homosexuals in our community." The result had been a torrent of dissent from more conservative and anti-gay Catholics, criticism that seemed to throw the *Progress* into the fight to explain precisely what the Catholic Church's post–Vatican II stance was.[1]

At the time, DeNeal was president of Seattle's Dignity chapter.

Half the questions in the *Progress* interview echoed those the *University of Washington Daily* had asked of the anonymous "Jim" twelve years earlier: how DeNeal and Bokern discovered they were gay, what their families thought, what had been the cause of their homosexuality, and, somewhat more voyeuristically, what the gay bar scene in Seattle was like. But the other half moved beyond the usual theme of understanding sexual orientation. More bravely, the *Progress* reporter asked DeNeal and Bokern to comment on the Catholic Church's stance on homosexuality. There was a theological distinction, for example, made in Rome only three years earlier, between "curable" homosexuals and "incurable" homosexuals, with different types of pastoral care to be directed to each. Homosexual orientation itself was not a sin, the church said, just the sex. The difference in the categories was that pastoral ministry for curable homosexuals meant encouraging them to become heterosexuals and holding them responsible if they did not, while incurable homosexuals should be treated respectfully, while being urged toward celibacy.

To the distinction, DeNeal curtly responded, "That's assuming first that there's something to be cured, when there really isn't."

Then he went further, drawing on his experiences as a volunteer counselor. The Catholic Church's approach, he suggested, was actually causing harm. "Some of these people who have been 'cured'—and I've seen them in working two years at Seattle Counseling Service—are grossly bent out of shape. They're scarred beyond proportion. I don't think there's any way . . . the Church can make up for that tremendous destruction."

Bokern agreed. "Why cure something that is beautiful?" he asked.

The reporter pressed them to talk about the church dogma that tolerated "incurable" homosexual orientation but banned actual homosexual sex for everyone regardless of type. DeNeal answered, "My orientation is gay and I engage in activity. I don't think it's valid for the Catholic Church to deny the actualization of a person's feelings, of a person's gift."

Bokern added defiantly, "I don't have to ask anyone's permission to be gay. I don't have to explain myself. I'm not a second-class citizen because I'm gay. Why should I have to quail in front of anyone in order to be who I am?"

In the same series of articles, spread over three weeks, the *Progress* interviewed

Father Kirby Brown, a priest who had agreed to be Dignity Seattle's first chaplain. He too was skeptical of Rome's approach. "You cannot require celibacy of all gay people," he said. "The Church is not realistic."

"If someone comes up to me," Brown continued, "and says 'I have spent two or three years in the bar scene, and now I've found somebody and we've lived together for four months and we're trying to establish a permanent friendship and relationship . . . I'm not going to tell that person, 'Drop it.' . . . People have needs. There's only so much they can do at a point in their life. I will help that person to have a healthy friendship and love relationship and tell them, 'Do what you need for that to grow.'"

Throughout Estes's Initiative Thirteen campaign, the Catholic archdiocese stood with other mainstream churches in Seattle urging that the initiative be defeated and that gay civil rights be protected. But four days after the initiative was defeated, the *Northwest Progress,* the official voice of the archdiocese, finally took a stance against what DeNeal, Bokern, and Brown had said. Dignity, the newspaper editorialized, was refusing to adhere to Catholic doctrine.

"The church must be compassionate in her response to all her people," the editorial warned, "but compassion does not always mean compromise."[2] A public break had begun.

Joining the city's political conversation had been the overriding task of the 1970s, and during that decade many gay and lesbian activists had seemed to avoid direct public conflicts with the city's mainstream Catholic and Protestant churches. Most contact had been pursued privately—through religious allies, such as the Reverend Mineo Katagiri—or had been limited to the promotion of civil rights for homosexuals rather than altering church teachings about the morality of homosexuality. That had been true when securing the Church Council of Greater Seattle's opposition to Initiative Thirteen, for example.

As the 1980s opened, though, confrontations with the mainstream Christian churches in the city edged to the fore. As they created a new self-confidence, gays and lesbians were no longer content to be seen as apostate. In no place would the confrontation be more public or more agonizing than in Seattle's Catholic archdiocese.

The specific challenge facing Dignity was to try to alter two aspects of the Catholic Church: its theological dogma about homosexuality and its pastoral ministry to individual gay men and women. Dogma was controlled in Rome; pastoral ministry, at the local archdiocese. In Seattle, the Dignity chapter also faced another task related to social geography. If by the 1970s Renton and Capitol Hills had become the symbolic new center of the city's gay community, before that time they had been the focus of the city's Catholic community. Catholics and homosexuals had both come to occupy the same square mile, and so how the church hierarchy received gay and lesbian Catholics reverberated more intensely—

or at least more publicly—than the struggles in other religions. The Catholics controlled many institutions on Capitol Hill, and homosexuals now controlled many others.

Historically, the paths of Catholics and twentieth-century gays in Seattle began intertwining as early as the 1800s. French-speaking Catholic missionaries, for example, inserted the word *burdash* into the local Chinook jargon, referring in a derogatory way to the Native American men who cross-dressed or received anal intercourse. The gold rushes heightened the coming connection. At the turn of the century, when Bishop Edward O'Dea decided to move the Northwest diocese from Vancouver, Washington, to Seattle, his way of paying for a new cathedral overlooking Pioneer Square was to rely partly on the wealth being dropped by miners and loggers who were making places like the People's Theater and its teetotaling Catholic owner, John Considine, rich. The chosen place of Catholic settlement: the three interlocked peaks of First Hill, Renton Hill, and Capitol Hill. Largely under O'Dea's guidance, there were soon more Catholic churches, chapels, schools, and hospitals on the hills than there were stations of the cross.[3]

Not only did the Catholics occupy the three peaks and the shallow valleys in between, they competed with one another for control of the territory. The Jesuits alone established not only a university but two churches and a high school. In 1902, O'Dea evicted them from their original downtown parish overlooking Puget Sound and ordered them to move somewhere "beyond Eighteenth Street" so he could build his cathedral on the commanding cliff above Elliott Bay. Miffed, the Jesuits more quickly constructed their Church of the Immaculate Conception, running up a debt of sixty-five thousand dollars, siting it exactly on the eastern edge of Eighteenth and making sure it was the city's biggest, with 950 seats and two 140-foot towers. The church defiantly faced toward downtown rather than toward the neighborhood covered by the new parish.

Not to be outdone, O'Dea then hired the architects who had designed the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. By 1907, for five hundred thousand dollars, they had crowned the cliff overlooking downtown with a Beaux Arts version of the Italian Renaissance—St. James Cathedral, an immense, buff-colored, cross-shaped building with its own twin towers rising twenty feet higher than the Jesuits'. It seated thirteen hundred. One Catholic historian notes that O'Dea "wanted something immortal, a cathedral to last 'til doomsday, or longer, on a high hill where everyone could see it and say, 'That is the Catholic cathedral.'"[4] The diocese also started its own high school, Bellarmine, even though the Jesuits already had one, and even though not too far away, on another Capitol Hill slope, nuns had built Holy Names Academy, a huge domed high school for girls. The story was the same for hospitals: the Sisters of Providence started one on Renton Hill's south slope, while less than a mile away on First Hill so did the Cabrini nuns.

Even with all the grand monuments, though, Catholics were not entirely welcomed into the Northwest. In the 1920s, making use of the same initiative strategy that had been championed by George Cotterill and the Anti-Saloon League, the Ku Klux Klan in Oregon portrayed Catholics as un-American and won a popular campaign to outlaw all Catholic schools. When in 1924 the Klan launched a similar effort in Washington State, Initiative Forty-nine to ban parochial education, O'Dea and other Catholics convinced newspapers throughout the state to print the names of all those who signed the Klan's petitions—and then, in a tactic even more aggressive than that used by gay and lesbian activists during the Initiative Thirteen campaign in Seattle, they sent neighbors to ask the petition signers to withdraw their names. Soon thousands of embarrassed Protestants were claiming they had been deceived into signing the petitions. On election day, Catholics and their allies also posted supporters at every polling place in the state's major cities. The Klan initiative lost, but the local Catholic hierarchy would remember the lesson about resisting campaigns of intolerance launched as initiatives.[5]

In the 1960s, Catholics and gays in Seattle began to share a few more obvious common interests—the city's original fair housing ordinance, for example, which would eventually be amended in the 1970s to protect gays and lesbians. Passing the original law became the personal crusade of Seattle archbishop Thomas A. Connolly, who began ruling over Catholics in the city in 1948. Connolly had grown up in San Francisco near what was becoming that city's famous gay district, the Castro. In 1963, Seattle mayor Dorm Braman, the same mayor who urged a crackdown on homosexuals, opposed a proposed open housing law and insisted it be submitted to a citywide referendum, hoping it would be defeated. Connolly was enraged that citizens were being asked to vote on other people's moral and civil rights—just what the Klan had asked in the 1920s. From O'Dea's pulpit at St. James Cathedral, he thundered that "prejudice, discrimination and segregation are in absolute conflict with the Word of God." Then he permitted the cathedral to be used as the assembly point for Catholics marching in favor of the law. As one city newspaper put it, Connolly used a "firm but paternal voice" to "set the course for his flock to follow," and eventually the law passed.[6]

Throughout Connolly's reign in Seattle, however, the official Catholic understanding of homosexuality was guided by dogma from the Middle Ages, based on the views of St. Thomas Aquinas, who had argued that all human sex must be linked to procreation to be moral. To St. Thomas, homosexuals did not even exist; they were merely wayward heterosexuals committing immoral acts.

Being nonexistent as far as theology was concerned posed a strategic challenge for gay Catholics; one way around it was suggested in Seattle in December 1967, when leaders of homophile organizations from throughout the West gathered to help launch the new Dorian Society. Among them were representatives from California's Council on Religion and the Homosexual, a group actively organizing to change religious views within various churches. One speaker was the Reverend

Augustine Hartman, a Dominican priest. Hartman, according to the meeting report, "questioned what was the greater sin—a sexual act or keeping Negroes in ghettos or turning away someone coming for help. He said a sexual perversion could not come anywhere near a perversion of the mind. . . . [In] further discussion [he] indicated that the best way to approach Catholics would be by approaching individual priests and Catholic universities and seminaries."[7]

The effort, in other words, would have to advance church by church and priest by priest, with a particular focus on those in charge of local Catholic education. Hartman had predicted the best way into the church's conversation: through its day-to-day pastoral ministry and its classrooms, rather than through demands for change in Thomistic dogma. The key, his words seemed to suggest, was to keep the effort local and to work from the bottom of the church hierarchy up.

By the late 1960s, that effort began in earnest in Seattle, and it would grow more organized once the local Dignity chapter formed in 1972. Even in the 1960s, though, inroads were made as some Catholic priests tried to find a way to blend the theology of St. Thomas with the reality of providing pastoral care to the more vocal homosexual community they were encountering in the streets and in churches. Not surprisingly, the tensions between church doctrine and church ministry first emerged publicly at the city's universities, where priests were ministering to younger, questioning Catholics—like DeNeal and Bokern.

For example, at the University of Washington, there was the Reverend Ambrose Toomey, a Dominican priest at the Catholic student center. He had been interviewed for that first April 1967 series about homosexuality in the *University of Washington Daily* and he told the reporter that homosexuality did not deserve its "illness or defect" label. Toomey focused on love and intimacy, regardless of sexual orientation. "In a homosexual relationship in which physical intimacy is involved," he said, "are we dealing with a commitment of the two involved, a deep love relationship? If not, then it would seem to be using another person for immediate physical gratification, as is sometimes the case in heterosexual relationships. This can only cause deep psychological harm." But what if there was love involved? Toomey left a curious, connotative opening. He did not answer directly, but he recognized the possibility. "The proper environment of sexual intimacy is an integration of love and commitment to another person. Whether this is accomplished in a homosexual union or not, I don't know." Behind the scenes, Toomey was also in contact with Mineo Katagiri. When Katagiri asked his advice on whether to accept his own Unitarian Church's call to set up a street ministry, which would include homosexuals in Seattle, Toomey advised him to do so.[8]

Over on Capitol Hill, at the Jesuit campus of Seattle University, the questions over the church's sexual theology quickly became intense, embroiling the entire university.

For one thing, a group of gay men had moved into a run-down apartment building on James Street, next to the university campus. Doug Wyman, who was one

of them, remembers what happened. It was 1964 and Wyman had just been discharged from the U.S. Army for being homosexual. The apartment, which he shared with friends, was, he said, "a great party place, with a sleeping area for whoever happened to come to town." All his roommates were gay—several visibly so since they enjoyed wearing drag.

The Jesuit priests were unhappy, according to Wyman.[9] "They had published somewhere, maybe in their student newspaper, that students shouldn't walk on our side of the street because it would cause some problems. The students picked fights with us and said nasty things when they went by." One day, the students hurled a rock through a window and then stood outside taunting, "Come on out fags, we're going to get you." Wyman recalled, "I had these long curved swords and someone else had a long broadsword so we went after them and chased them."

"A few weeks later the same thing happened, with twenty or thirty students. We went out with a large cleaver and said, 'Hey, you may get us but we'll get one or two of you.' The police suggested we talk with the Seattle U. people, who wanted to talk with our 'leaders.'" Wyman laughed. "We sent Tom Morton who was very straight looking and I think Adrian, who wore big bouffant hairdos, went, and Billy went too—he was very, very visibly gay. And we sent Russell who was black."

Wyman remembers the university officials saying that "they thought we ought to move out."

"We said, we think you ought to stop [your students from] having riots with us."

Eventually, Wyman and the others did move away, but not before airing their complaints to a local community radio station. The radio show got Wyman an invitation from Katagiri to help organize the Dorian Society.

Then, in December 1965, the debate moved even more dramatically onto the Catholic campus. One of the university's two African American professors asserted almost heretically that Thomistic interpretations of natural law could no longer provide a foundation for a modern philosophy of life. In a dense scholarly article that filled almost two pages in the student newspaper, he argued that "phenomenological psychology" and "humanistic existentialism," both arising from individual experience rather than theology, were the "unavoidable foundation stones for any worthwhile operational philosophy."

Natural law, with its emphasis that the only moral sex was sex open to procreation, had always been the foundation for the church's condemnation of homosexuality. The professor's attack, however couched in scholarship, was a direct assault. He announced plans for another article in the paper; even its ponderous title—"In Defense of Responsible Permissiveness toward Sex in the Human Adventure"—made clear the challenge of Catholic teachings about sex. At that point the university president, Jesuit priest John Fitterer, stepped in. Fitterer, often called "Smiling Jack" by the faculty because he was photogenic and slickly articulate with sound bites, was also often a censor of whatever he thought was inappropriate to discuss at a Catholic school. He had already rebuked the professor for

the first article; now he went further and ordered the student newspaper not to print the second tract. Immediately, ten professors resigned in protest, arguing violation of academic freedom. One denounced Fitterer and the Jesuits for running a "pastoral ghetto" instead of a university.[10]

Banned from printing a philosophical challenge to church teachings, the student newspaper, the *Spectator,* did manage in May 1966 to publish what may have been its first story about homosexuality itself, cast within a great deal of discussion about morality. The story reveals how Catholics on Capitol Hill were beginning to think about their new neighbors. It was a news report on two speakers sponsored by the campus Christian Activities Program. One was a Jesuit priest, James Royce, then head of the psychology department; the other was Dr. Irving Goldberg, a clinical psychologist. Goldberg challenged the church teaching that homosexuality was a sin; Royce, on the other hand, appears to have been at pains to find an accommodation between Catholic moral teachings and his allegiance to the academic discipline of psychology. Both men reinforced more misconceptions than they dispelled. The paper reported, "The two called homosexuality a disorder of adaptation, the product of arrested development. . . . Dr. Goldberg pointed out the conscious will is lacking in homosexuality and therefore it is not a sin. Fr. Royce maintained that while subjectively this might be so, being homosexual does not remove one from moral responsibility."[11]

Then, in October 1966, the *Spectator* published pictures and stories about an attractive, young, blonde-haired former priest who was coming to campus to discuss "Reform of the Church." The priest had just been defrocked and banned from speaking at several other Catholic campuses, including Notre Dame, Holy Cross, and the Jesuits' own University of San Francisco. Seattle University would be the first Catholic campus to allow him to speak. On October 13, a standing-room-only crowd packed the university's biggest auditorium to listen to William DuBay preach his radical message. Priests, he told the crowd, had to start paying more attention to the needs of people and less attention to rigid Catholic dogma, especially about sex. DuBay, of course, would eventually come out as gay as he worked in the 1970s to establish Stonewall at the old Carmelite monastery just a few blocks away.

After DuBay's talk in 1966, "Smiling Jack" Fitterer issued a statement disavowing any endorsement by the Jesuits or the university.[12]

The conflict in Seattle over Catholic theologies of sex and Catholic ways of ministering to homosexuals had begun in earnest.

For the first three years, from 1972 to 1975, gay Catholics in Seattle's Dignity chapter worked quietly, in apparent harmony with Hartman's suggestion that more progress could be made through individual approaches than through public challenges. Dignity members met in one another's homes; they talked with priests and Catholic educators about their concerns. They maintained a low profile. During

those years, the Catholic hierarchy in Seattle had little to say directly or officially about homosexuality, either in dogmatic terms or in terms of actual ministry to individuals. A check with the archdiocese's archivist, for example, turned up no statements from Archbishop Connolly or any of his top advisers.[13] But after 1975, that changed dramatically. That year, two events occurred that began to reshape the relationship between local gay Catholics and the church hierarchy.

The first happened in Rome. Bishops who had attended the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s were still busy producing clarifications. One such paper, entitled a "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics," focused on homosexuality. Finally, Thomas Aquinas's theology began to be modified in the face of modern psychology's insistence that there were indeed different sexual orientations. In the new document, Rome would still argue the Thomist line that some homosexuals were simply heterosexuals making bad choices, but now the church theologians also acknowledged that some were homosexual "because of some kind of innate instinct or a pathological constitution judged to be incurable."

The declaration pointed to a dilemma, but did not solve it. "In the pastoral field," it said, "these [incurable] homosexuals must certainly be treated with understanding and sustained in the hope of overcoming their personal difficulties and their inability to fit into society. Their culpability will be judged with prudence."[14] At the level of the ordinary parish priest attempting to engage in ministry—say, a Kirby Brown in Seattle—the dilemma was how to counsel someone who was no longer morally to blame for his or her sexual acts, but whose sexual acts were still considered disordered.

The second event of 1975 occurred locally, at St. James Cathedral. There, in May, the long reign of Archbishop Connolly ended. Raymond Hunthausen, then the bishop of the diocese of Helena in Montana, moved in.

It was going to be his job to figure out how to actually apply that declaration of sexual ethics to the real gay men and women who were in Dignity.

Dutch Hunthausen, as friends called him, had grown up on the wrong side of the tracks, the poor side of Anaconda, Montana, where an earlier generation of Catholic immigrants, German and Irish, had gone to work the mines. He was plainspoken and even grandfatherly, not at all given to flashy suits, fancy speeches, or pomp. Yet like the Reverend Mark Matthews, Hunthausen would have an enormous impact on Seattle; arguably the two were the city's most important religious leaders during the twentieth century. Both followed a social gospel, promoting programs for the poor and calling attention to injustices. But whereas Matthews excoriated the undesirables with Calvinistic glee and went to great lengths to actively destroy the saloons that he saw as the source of vice, Hunthausen would preach in a different tone. Compassion, he would urge. Always compassion.

In Anaconda, he had fit the definition of the "good little boy," bright and deferential to those in authority, particularly to the Ursuline nuns who had taught

him in elementary school. Extremely shy as a child, he never sought the spotlight, but he also respectfully agreed to the nuns' request that he give the welcoming speeches whenever the bishop visited. "It was good for people to push me," he would say in an interview years later. "They saw things that I should be doing even if I didn't see them."[15] By the peak of his career in Seattle, Hunthausen would be known worldwide for his stance against nuclear weapons. He denounced a nearby Trident submarine base as the "Auschwitz of Puget Sound" and refused to pay taxes to support war. Daniel Berrigan, the famous Jesuit, would call him one of the "modern visionaries of our history, a bishop walking toward a new center . . . creating a center of understanding."

Hunthausen felt a passion for social justice. When he arrived in Seattle, he eschewed the fancy archbishop's house where Connolly had lived and chose instead a simple room in the rectory next to St. James. He drove a Volkswagen and sometimes ate lunch at the McDonald's a block away from the cathedral, joining the fast food lines like everyone else.

The major influence upon him had been the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s, which he had attended as a new bishop in Helena. There he listened to the debates that would forever excite and shape him. "Everything that happened there resonated with my own sense and feelings about what church is and what it ought to be," Hunthausen would say. Eagerly, he became part of the new wave of bishops determined to carry out the council's reforms. Little did he know that his greatest test would be finding a way to respond to the calls for justice from his now more visible gay neighbors in Seattle.

In fall 1976, shortly after Hunthausen arrived at St. James, the U.S. bishops issued an official declaration about homosexuality. It said, "Homosexuals, like everyone else, should not suffer from prejudice against their basic human rights. They have a right to respect, friendship and justice. They should have an active role in the Christian community."

Trying to implement that statement would eventually bring Hunthausen into a direct conflict with Rome.

In spring 1977, when Charlie Brydon's Dorian Group launched an effort to amend the Washington State civil rights law so that it would protect homosexuals from discrimination in jobs and public accommodations, the question of whether to support the bill came not only to Hunthausen, but to his fellow bishops sitting in Spokane and Yakima. The discussions among the three were not public, so it is not clear whether the decision was a difficult or a quick one, but in the statement was their resolution of an issue posed, on the one hand, by the 1975 declaration from Rome and, on the other, the 1976 stand by the U.S. bishops. Whatever the church's feeling about the first category of homosexuals (the ones who were really just misbehaving heterosexuals), when it came to making laws, pastoral support for the innate and incurable homosexual required that discrimination be outlawed.

The statement from Hunthausen and his fellow bishops referred to the "terrible impact" of discrimination and called for "all people to cease and desist from discriminatory activity." To discriminate against gays and lesbians, the bishops said, "is not only contrary to sound religious principles but in conflict with protection of basic rights in our American civil life."[16]

It was just a short while later, in July 1977, that Hunthausen endorsed Mayor Wes Uhlman's first declaration of a Gay Pride Week in Seattle, even while delicately sidestepping any direct reference to the words "gay pride." Instead, it was "a special week" to focus on the injustices committed against homosexuals.

Criticisms of the new archbishop's stand began immediately. One letter to the *Northwest Progress* argued that Hunthausen was condoning homosexuality. "Mayor Uhlman didn't just say homosexuals' civil rights should be respected," the letter writer said. "He proclaimed Gay Pride Week! Should we proclaim Murderer's Pride Week? How about Liars' Pride Week? Temper Pride Week? Adulterers' Pride Week?" Other writers flatly refused to accept the fact that Catholic theology about homosexuality had indeed changed. Homosexuals who were public about their sexual orientation, they argued, had no place in Catholic congregations. One Catholic wrote to the *Progress,* "Homosexuals should be legislated out of a civilized society to remove their vile influence."[17]

It was clear that Hunthausen had work to do among his flock, if only to educate them about the 1975 declaration. That, as well as Initiative Thirteen, seemed to be one of the major purposes of the series in the *Progress* in 1978. One of the three articles focused on Dignity; others allowed diocesan theologian Lawrence Reilly to explain the distinctions that Rome and Hunthausen were making. Homosexuality, Reilly said, was an orientation—he called it a "phenomenon" that was "not normal." Homosexual acts, like all sexual acts not aimed at procreation, were a product of original sin and were therefore evil, but homosexual persons were not evil and so they deserved the "same rights to fundamental justice and human respect as anyone else."[18]

Reilly conceded, though, that numerous pastoral questions had been raised by the 1975 declaration and that "the church has not addressed all these specific questions." The sheer length of his list made clear just how many there were:

> Are there any circumstances in which homosexual acts can be good? Are there circumstances in which homosexual union can at least be tolerated? Can a homosexual receive the Eucharist? Should a priest give communion to a known homosexual couple? Is the Church someday going to bless homosexual marriages as some ministers and priests have already done? Should Catholics support sexual minority movements? Should Catholics vote to allow homosexuals to teach in the public schools? Should we encourage the hiring of homosexuals in our Catholic schools? Can homosexuality be cured and, if so, should a Catholic homosexual actively seek to be cured? If a homosexual can't be cured, just how is he or she supposed to live? If a

> homosexual is unable to live a celibate life, should he or she be excluded from receiving the sacraments [which included not only the Eucharist but blessings at death]? Don't we have an obligation to protect our children since homosexuality is believed to be frequently caused by the negative influence of adults on children? Is homosexuality an alternative lifestyle in the Church?

Certainly it was enough to keep both pastoral and dogmatic debates going for a long while.

After the 1975 declaration, members in Seattle's Dignity chapter became bolder. In 1977, they decided to ask whether they could hold their meetings on church property itself. Would any parish be willing to designate one particular monthly Mass at which lesbians and gay men could know they were welcome?

At first, they encountered resistance.

St. Patrick's Church, at the north edge of Capitol Hill, refused them, although it was a gentle refusal, the parish council going so far as to say that homosexuals could join the regular Masses, but a particular Mass aimed at homosexuals would not be scheduled.

Finally, a parish run by the Redemptorist order in downtown Seattle agreed. Father Lyle Konen did his best to make it sound like a casual decision when the *Northwest Progress* reported the event. "I talked it over with a couple of the fathers," he said, "and we couldn't see why not."

"It's not my church" he explained in Vatican II language. "It's the people's church. I'm just the custodian, in the spiritual sense."

"I believe [homosexuals are] children of God, just as anyone else, and that they have a right to be listened to and to be spiritually helped. . . . They have a right to pray and receive the sacraments as well as anybody else."[19]

It was a response born out of pastoral ministry, not out of dogmatic analysis.

Eventually it would be the Jesuits, so busy redefining their own mission to focus more on social justice concerns, who would agree to let Dignity move its Mass to the obvious location, their Capitol Hill church, St. Joseph's, at the corner of Eighteenth Avenue East and Aloha Street. Then, except for the brief public crossfire in the *Progress* in 1978, the issue quieted for a few years. Masses for Dignity members were not different from any other Mass; the core of the ritual was unchangeable and anyone of any sexual orientation could attend. It was simply that at a particular Mass, in this case Sunday evenings, one could expect that homosexuals would be especially welcome and acknowledged, with priests perhaps making a special point to refer to gay and lesbian concerns in their homilies. Dignity members made special banners, Dignity members organized church socials after Mass, Dignity members helped the priests behind the scenes.

Then in the summer of 1983, when a strange new virus began to make its way into Seattle's gay community and raise the visibility of homosexual sex and rela-

tionships toward a new peak, the underlying conflict over dogma began fatefully rumbling toward an explosion.

At the beginning of that year, gay political activists from the Dorian Group had again asked the state legislature to amend the state civil rights law to prevent employers from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation. Once again, the Catholic bishops in Washington State had endorsed the request. And once again, the bill had been defeated.

This time, though, following Archbishop Hunthausen's lead, the bishops in the state decided in June—during the gay pride celebrations—to issue a teaching document called "The Prejudice against Homosexuals and the Ministry of the Church." Filling more than two full pages in the *Progress,* it provided, on the one hand, a detailed reiteration of church doctrine about the evil of homosexual sex, but, on the other, it contained remarkable pastoral statements of appreciation for homosexuals. Among them, for example, was this comment: "A homosexual person may manifest virtues and qualities that are admirable by any standard. In fact, there is some evidence that many homosexuals possess important attributes that are often, unfortunately, lacking in their straight counterparts. Thus, it appears that sensitivity to the needs of persons and the ability to express warm feelings towards both men and women are frequently present in gays. Hence, the church, which considers a person as a whole, can find much good to be praised."[20]

Here, suddenly, was a church document—from bishops, no less—citing homosexuals as role models and actually commending their "important attributes" to heterosexual attention—not to mention adopting the street language referring to heterosexuals as "straight."

The document also attacked attempts to get homosexuals to change their sexual orientation, saying they were not to be blamed for failing to do so.

Also, during the June gay pride events, Hunthausen moved even further in his pastoral role, agreeing for the first time to address the Dorian Group, in a meeting at the downtown Mayflower Park Hotel. Delicately, the title of his speech focused on his favorite topic of "Peace and Disarmament." But at one moment during his speech, the archbishop paused and acknowledged the significance of the occasion. It was the first time in Seattle that someone with such rank in the Catholic Church had met officially and publicly with a gay activist group.

"I hope it's not the last," he quietly told them.[21]

By then, Hunthausen had already made what would become his most controversial decision, one that would bring Rome directly into the changes that were occurring on Catholic Hill.

Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, one of Hunthausen's favorite themes was "conversion." By that word, he did not so much mean converting others to Christianity, as missionaries might, but converting an individual away from the convenient values offered by society toward those offered by the gospel. Theologians

that he hired for the archdiocese argued that the Christian Church was never meant to be comfortably aligned with the majority, but rather represented a minority people actually living as witnesses to a different set of values. Hunthausen's tone distinctly differed from that of Seattle's other highly charismatic religious leader, Mark Matthews, who in the early twentieth century had instead sought conversions for the purpose of forging a political majority and legislating public policy.

Hunthausen had no grand political strategy for converting people. It was more a matter of slow discernment—figuring out what the appropriate response was to whatever question suddenly presented itself. One night in an interview at the chancery next to St. James, he wryly smiled, "The Spirit doesn't necessarily hit you over the head."[22]

In 1983, local members of Dignity relayed a request to him. The national organization of Dignity had decided to schedule its annual conference in Seattle. The local organizers wondered, Would the archbishop permit St. James Cathedral to be used for a special Mass for those attending the conference?

Hunthausen had not sought out the question, but neither did he shrink from it. Looked at one way, the answer was a simple enough "yes." Masses for special occasions were not that extraordinary. But no one would miss the symbolism of allowing Dignity to transport itself, even once, from the Jesuits' St. Joseph to the archdiocese's St. James.

After pondering, Hunthausen agreed. In an unusual move, the *Northwest Progress* then carried a long interview in which the archbishop explained himself. Catholics, he insisted, must no longer scorn homosexuals. "They must be recognized as full members of the church, integrated into the parish community." That, he acknowledged, "is painfully hard for many of our people to accept." Hunthausen would lead.[23]

On Saturday of Labor Day weekend, more than twelve hundred people, mostly gay and lesbian, moved across the cathedral's balcony with its expansive view of downtown Seattle and went inside to pray. Some forty-five priests, chaplains from the various Dignity chapters around the country, assembled to celebrate what was no ordinary Mass. At the time, Hunthausen himself was in Rome, but he sent a videotape of welcome. "While I am not able to be with you in person," he told the delegates through the video, "I am surely with you in spirit and prayer."

Outside the cathedral about 150 people, including some priests, marched with signs proclaiming: "Remember Sodom and Gomorrah," "Pray for Gays," and "God is not Gay." One priest from Portland condemned the use of the cathedral by homosexuals as "a profanation" and "a sacrilege."[24]

In the *Progress* interview, Hunthausen had said, "I decided that this was a risk that ought to be taken in order to deal with this delicate and highly charged issue in a Christian manner."

Then he had admitted, "I would be naive if I did not acknowledge that the subject is sensitive and volatile."

With that, gay Catholics in Seattle, for all practical purposes, no longer held the title role as the protagonist pushing for changes in the church conversation. Like the rest of the city, they would become observers of a titanic clash over dogma and ministry between Rome and Seattle.

The Vatican moved surprisingly swiftly.

Fewer than eight weeks passed before the Vatican ordered a special investigation, dispatching a well-known conservative on social issues, Archbishop James Hickey of Washington, D.C., to examine, as Hickey obliquely put it, the "criticism regarding pastoral ministry in Seattle." Some tended to assume that the Seattle archbishop's stance on peace and nuclear weapons had caused the Vatican's response, but that was not the case. The catalyst, it would become clear, was the Dignity Mass at St. James. Publicly, Hickey tried to soften the appearance of what was occurring, saying he was coming "not as a grand inquisitor . . . but to support my brother bishop." Yet no one missed the obvious elliptical coding in his communication: that Hunthausen somehow required the "support" of a conservative bishop handpicked by a conservative pope.[25]

During November 1983, Hickey questioned about seventy critics and supporters. Then he left, and for two years nothing happened, at least in public. Simply leaving the matter unresolved cast doubt on Hunthausen, though, and became an irritating way of discrediting his sympathetic response to gays.

In fall 1985, the Vatican finally acted again.

The first news the public heard was overwhelmingly positive for Hunthausen. A church heavyweight, Rome's ambassador to the United States, Archbishop Pio Laghi, sent a letter in November that bluntly attacked the "exaggerated and mean-spirited criticism" that Hunthausen's opponents had been making and warmly praised the archbishop's "clear evidence of loyalty to the church." There were "areas of concern," Laghi noted, where Hunthausen needed to show "greater vigilance in upholding the church's teaching." One was the ministry to homosexuals. In the letter released to the public, Laghi said no more than that. It seemed the gentlest possible of criticisms.[26]

But what was not publicly known at the time was that six weeks earlier, at the end of September, another powerful Vatican bureaucrat, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, had sent a confidential and far blunter letter. He headed the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the successor to the church's Inquisition office. In that letter Ratzinger said, "The Archdiocese should withdraw all support from any group which does not unequivocally accept the teaching of the Magisterium concerning the intrinsic evil of homosexual activity. The ill-advised welcome of a pro-homosexual group to your cathedral . . . served to make the Church's position appear to be ambiguous on this delicate but important point. A compassionate ministry to homosexual persons must be developed that has as its clear goal the promotion of a chaste lifestyle."[27]

It was a clear order to expel Dignity, to have no further dealings with the group, and to create a pastoral ministry that would press homosexuals to remain chaste. The fact that Rome had assigned two powerful spokesmen to write the letters indicated the seriousness with which the Vatican viewed the issue.

Two weeks later, Rome suddenly announced that an "auxiliary" bishop named Donald Wuerl would soon be arriving in Seattle to "help" Hunthausen with his duties. That added a new element of mystery to what the public knew. The official guise was that Hunthausen had requested such help with pastoral duties; his previous assistant had retired two years earlier. But even under normal circumstances, Wuerl would have been the oddest of choices. A native of Pittsburgh, the forty-five-year-old priest had never worked in the Northwest and had only been slightly involved in any pastoral ministry whatsoever. Instead, he had worked as a secretary to Pittsburgh's Cardinal John Wright and had followed Wright to the Vatican, where for ten years as a church bureaucrat he had mingled with cardinals and the pope. Then he had returned to Pittsburgh to become a seminary professor. Some who knew him called him a "rock-hard orthodox priest," his doctrinal understandings not yet enhanced by pastoral insights. Also, the Vatican had curiously chosen the title of "auxiliary bishop with special faculties" rather than the more customary "assistant bishop." What could that phrase indicate? local Catholics wondered. Hunthausen's opponents immediately celebrated the appointment.[28]

If there was any doubt about why Wuerl was being sent, it disappeared a month later when Pope John Paul II himself called Wuerl to Rome to be ordained as auxiliary bishop. For the ordination, the pope gave Wuerl one of his own personal miters—the one that the pope had worn on a visit to the Netherlands when liberal Dutch Catholics had booed him.[29]

No one familiar with the Church's sometimes elliptical and metaphorical way of speaking could miss the symbolic message.

After Wuerl arrived, Hunthausen at first tried to maintain harmony. As far as he was concerned, he would later say, Wuerl was just a helper, and officially Hunthausen welcomed him. But personally Wuerl could not have been more different from Hunthausen. The archbishop had come from a small Montana town where he affably, if shyly, knew everyone; Wuerl had grown up on a Pittsburgh hillside isolated from the rest of the city. Sternly gaunt and tall, he was a contrast to Hunthausen's pudginess. He wore finely tailored trench coats and well-polished shoes, causing a *Post-Intelligencer* reporter to write that Wuerl looked as if he had stepped from the pages of *Gentlemen's Quarterly*. The reporter added that, by contrast, Hunthausen looked as if he bought his clothes from REI, a popular outdoors co-op in Seattle. Ignoring Hunthausen's decision to live in a small, ascetic room next to the cathedral, Wuerl suggested the diocese rent a condo in the pricey downtown Watermark Towers for him. The diocese instead sent him its own metaphor, housing him in a small apartment in West Seattle—not at all close to the cathedral. Shortly after he started work, Wuerl ordered a partition erected to separate

his office from an open room. The wall quickly became yet another metaphor, a symbol of Wuerl's distance from everyone. Reports had it that during one of his first meetings with priests in Seattle, Wuerl had delivered a fire-and-brimstone speech promising punishment for any "renegades." "It's been all downhill since," a source told the *Post-Intelligencer*.[30]

By summer 1986 Hunthausen and Wuerl had begun to clash over decisions, and it was clear to Hunthausen that the two had very different ideas of the auxiliary bishop's power. Writing to Rome, Hunthausen demanded clarification. When he got it, he was so angry that he refused to keep the information secret. The pope, Hunthausen revealed to the news media in September, had ordered him to surrender "complete and final decision-making power" to Wuerl in several areas of ministry, among them all decisions relating to gays and lesbians. The Vatican's move was astonishing, quickly generating a national swirl of news stories as well as an unprecedented five-hour meeting among priests in the archdiocese—some of whom told of parishioners struggling in tears to try to understand what had happened. A month later, the conflict grew even nastier when the Vatican released a three-and-a-half-page letter detailing its criticisms, among them that Hunthausen needed to avoid "erroneous doctrines" with regard to his empathetic treatment of homosexuals and eliminate "affiliations with groups promoting doctrines contrary to the church's teachings."[31]

Wuerl, then, was not simply Hunthausen's helper; he was a second archbishop sitting in the same archdiocese.

At the end of October, more news from Rome arrived. In what became known instantly as the Halloween letter, Cardinal Ratzinger declared—in a throwback to the church's earlier Thomistic views—that homosexuality was "an intrinsic moral evil" and "an objective disorder." He instructed American bishops to exclude from church property any groups working to protect homosexuals from discrimination and any groups that disagreed with his analysis of church dogma. That meant Dignity.[32]

The group's national leadership responded strongly, insisting that gay Catholics should be able to have committed relationships that included sex. In Seattle, the Dignity chapter was still sponsoring Masses at St. Joseph's with the support of the local Jesuits and the archbishop, but Wuerl held the papal authority to take the next step. Most expected him to move quickly.

Instead, the American bishops acted first. Their national conference had already been scheduled for November 10, and whatever their individual feelings about Hunthausen's stance, the bishops knew that what the Vatican had done by sending in Wuerl was an extraordinary interference in the operation of a local diocese. Yet they could not directly challenge the pope's authority. Concerned, they announced they would allow Hunthausen to present his side at their national meeting. That itself sent a message to Rome.

Once at the meeting, Hunthausen bluntly told his fellow bishops that he con-

sidered the situation with Wuerl to be unworkable. He offered to resign and pleaded with them, saying he was "absolutely convinced that the matter of the governance of the church of Seattle needs to be returned to normal as soon as humanly possible, I would even say at once."[33]

It was a dramatic challenge, one that the bishops discussed for an extraordinary five hours in closed sessions.

When the final statement from the conference was issued, on the surface it seemed as if the bishops had sided with the Vatican, saying that the disciplining deserved "our respect and confidence" and that their first allegiance lay with the pope. That was proper, official language. But there was also other curious wording. For example, the bishops said they were "not able to review, much less judge, a case involving a diocesan bishop and the Holy See," language that deferred to the Vatican. Yet, as one analyst wryly noted, they had just spent the better part of three days doing exactly that review. They also offered "any assistance judged helpful and appropriate by the parties involved," virtually treating the pope and Hunthausen as quarrelling spouses. Metaphorically calling the church a family, rather than treating it as a hierarchy governed from Rome, they delicately criticized the way the Vatican had launched a secret investigation that had caused a great deal of hurt: "A family takes steps to see that, in so far as possible, a painful situation does not happen again."

Seemingly deliberate leaks from several bishops also made it very publicly clear that the conference had specifically rejected a previous draft approving of the pope's investigation. Instead, the bishops had substituted language merely acknowledging that the investigation had been pursued in a way consistent with church law. In another subtle message, the bishops pointedly humbled Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston, by rejecting his nomination for eight different national posts in the organization. Law had outspokenly supported the Vatican's seizure of power from Hunthausen.[34]

Slowly, it seemed that Rome began to take heed. The pope was planning to visit the United States the following year; it would not have been in his interest to arrive with such an open, if somewhat coded, conflict occurring with the American church's leadership. It was time to turn down the public heat, and in January 1987, the pope's ambassador to the United States, Pio Laghi, granted a rare interview to a *New York Times* reporter, Joseph Berger. While trying to defend what the Vatican had done and how it had conducted its investigation, he also acknowledged that perhaps the investigation, and the subsequent appointment of Wuerl, could have been handled differently. "I am learning also," he told Berger. Then, in February 1987, came a very terse but significant press release, issued by Laghi through the Americans' National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The pope, he said, had asked that a commission of two American cardinals and one archbishop reinvestigate and "assess the current situation in Seattle." The group consisted of three of the American church's most influential: Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago,

Cardinal John O'Connor of New York, and Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco.[35]

Wuerl, meanwhile, bided his time. A week after the announcement about the commission, he visited Rome and met privately with the pope, the *Northwest Progress* noting only that "the Vatican released no details of the meeting and Bishop Wuerl refused to comment on what was discussed." Even as other dioceses began expelling what few remaining Dignity chapters were meeting on church property, Dignity continued its Masses at St. Joseph's. Hunthausen's critics fumed. One, a retired lawyer named William Gaffney, complained to the *Washington Post* in February 1987 that "they [Dignity members] have no right to be there. And I hope they get kicked the hell out of there. I'm pretty hot about this. Some people are going to hell about these teachings [on homosexuality]."[36]

Another month passed, during which the new commission began its inquiries, interviewing past and present bishops in the Pacific Northwest, as well as members of the archdiocesan staff. Then Hunthausen himself met with the commission in Chicago. Reports circulated that he appeared troubled and withdrawn after the meeting; the *National Catholic Register,* a weekly in Los Angeles, suggested that the Vatican and even the commission had pressured him to resign. The chancellor of the archdiocese, Michael Ryan—the number three priest in the local hierarchy after Hunthausen and Wuerl—took the unusual step of issuing a letter to all the archdiocesan priests saying the rumors were untrue. Everyone had become edgy, waiting.[37]

A few more weeks passed, and then it seemed as if Wuerl had finally decided to launch the move against Dignity. On April 23, the *Post-Intelligencer* reported that in a private conversation with Dignity board members, Wuerl had ordered the group to cancel its Mass at St. Joe's. "Wuerl Orders Halt to Sponsored Services," the front-page headline read.

The next day, Wuerl surprised everyone. Through an archdiocesan spokesman, he unequivocally denied the report. Dignity's own directors backed him, saying there had been "absolutely no decision." But a priest who had attended the meeting and requested anonymity stood by the initial report, telling the *Post-Intelligencer,* "We're getting to hardball here. It's not a question of if, but of when and how. That's still up for discussion, as are many things in this archdiocese."[38]

A *Seattle Times* headline a few days later caught the drama. "Last Act of Hunthausen 'Play' Remains Unwritten," it said. One scenario: Hunthausen would resign, Wuerl would be promoted to bishop in his own diocese, and Seattle would get a new archbishop. That was what the *National Catholic Register* had speculated, and it had been right earlier than everyone else in reporting that Wuerl had been given special powers. A second scenario: Hunthausen would get a new "coadjutor bishop" who would eventually succeed him when he retired, and, again, Wuerl would get his own diocese.[39] Everyone went back to waiting.

And Dignity continued sponsoring the weekly Mass.

As it would turn out, Wuerl would never use his special powers. He had been trained to move discreetly as a church bureaucrat, and he was, as many of his critics enjoyed pointing out, an ambitious man hopeful of rising in the hierarchy. The pope had given him a difficult assignment, and what he likely understood—or had been told—was that he did not need to do anything more than be the pope's personal symbol of authority in Seattle. Years later, Wuerl told a reporter for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* that he never used his papal powers in Seattle because he did not want to add more fuel to an already blazing fire. Hunthausen's opponents, he acknowledged, would never forgive him.[40] Wuerl's presence was communication enough, and so, in a paradoxical way, the Seattle archdiocese became the one safe location where it was still okay for Dignity to meet on church property. Wuerl's task was simply to wait for the resolution to be created elsewhere, in this case by the bishops' new blue-ribbon commission.

Among the commission members, Cardinal Bernardin in particular held a reputation for engineering creative compromises that left no one clearly denoted as a winner, but rather left everyone able to maneuver. And that was what was going to be needed to extract both the Seattle church and the Vatican from what had become a far too sensitive crisis.

In May 1987, the commission announced the end of the "play." Hunthausen should get all his powers back, but he should also get a new coadjutor bishop to help him in his duties and replace him when he retired. Unlike Wuerl, the coadjutor would clearly be second in charge. The Vatican had even agreed to a coadjutor with a liberal and pastoral reputation, chosen from Hunthausen's own home state of Montana.

Priests and newspapers quickly hailed the new man, Thomas Murphy. In contrast to Wuerl, whose photos often presented a stern, unsmiling face, Murphy fairly bubbled; one headline even played on his Irish background and dubbed him "Happy" Murphy.

For the American bishops and Hunthausen, "it was a victory," as journalist David Anderson observed. One of several *Post-Intelligencer* headlines read: "American Bishops Pull Off a Victory Ever So Politely." It had been won, Anderson noted, "using classic church political strategy—avoiding confrontation and letting protestations of powerlessness and non-interference speak more powerfully than direct protest." The bishops had "dramatically demonstrated the power of the politics of ecclesiastical ellipsis," and by doing so had won their "significant war of nerves with the Vatican."

As for Wuerl, he went home to Pittsburgh. Nine months later, he became bishop of that city's more than three-quarter million Catholics.[41]

Buried amid the sidebars in the newspapers, though, was the most dangerous development for Seattle's gay and lesbian Catholics. As part of the announcement, the Vatican had released the text of the secret 1985 letter that Cardinal Ratzinger had

sent to Hunthausen, ordering him to withdraw all support from groups that did not accept the church's teaching on homosexuality. As long as Wuerl had been in charge of the issue, Hunthausen was not responsible for acting. But now the problem was back in Hunthausen's hands. The commission of bishops had dictated that the Ratzinger letter must be used as the "primary guide for the direction in which the church in Seattle must move." No date was publicly specified, of course—that would have been too direct—but the commission promised to assist Hunthausen "during the course of the next year," suggesting that was the maximum time to make the change.[42]

But Hunthausen was not the only bishop struggling over the issue of Dignity. Perhaps not coincidentally, two members of the commission itself, Cardinal Bernardin and Archbishop Quinn, still had in their own dioceses two of the last Dignity chapters that were meeting on church property.

For a year, Hunthausen continued to allow Dignity to meet at St. Joseph's. Then, when Hunthausen's review was due to end, it was Bernardin who launched a trial balloon. Everyone had expected that Ratzinger's order meant Masses for homosexuals had to end. Bernardin, though, found a compromise possible within Ratzinger's own words. "A compassionate ministry to homosexual persons must be developed," the Vatican cardinal had written, intending that homosexuals be taught to be celibate. In mid-May 1988, Bernardin announced that in Chicago the archdiocese itself would set up a special ministerial office to take over the Dignity Mass for homosexuals—and, very importantly, to keep offering it. One Dignity officer there called the new Bernardin approach "a dynamic model that other bishops can follow."[43]

Hunthausen waited six more weeks. His liaisons contacted the Seattle Dignity chapter. How would they respond to the Bernardin approach? There would not be any real changes made in the Mass, its location at St. Joseph's, or even its time on Sunday evenings. It was just that a new archdiocesan office for gay and lesbian ministry, rather than Dignity, would now officially sponsor the Mass. Hunthausen even promised to underscore his commitment to gays and lesbians in a very special way. This time, he would not just send a video; he himself would go to St. Joseph's to preach the first Mass to be offered under the new sponsorship.

For the Dignity members, the choice felt agonizing. To some, the offer seemed a reasonable face-saving way to let Rome control dogma while local priests pursued the kind of pastoral ministry that seemed appropriate. To others, it felt like a hierarchical demand to return to the closet. Ed Elliott, who had become Seattle Dignity's president, said, "Hunthausen is the best bishop we have in the country" and the most serious about a real ministry to lesbian and gay Catholics. "Many of us feel the best thing we can do now is to continue to have dialogue with the church, so the church can someday show some movement."

Everyone was angry at the Vatican. "Dignity was doing a good job," Elliott argued, and would never have been evicted had it not been for Rome.

The chapter vote split evenly. Dignity would neither endorse the new archdiocesan gay and lesbian ministry nor set up a separate ritual. "What the decision does," Elliott announced, "is to leave each member of Dignity free to participate or not in the archdiocesan Mass."

On June 30, 1988, Hunthausen ordered St. Joseph's to stop allowing the Dignity chapter any official use of church property and any public sponsorship of a Mass. The date of Dignity's final sponsorship of a Mass was set for July 10.

That Sunday evening, gays, lesbians, and their friends packed the church. Outside, Jim MacKeller, a member of Dignity's board, told TV reporters hopefully that at least for now the church was officially recognizing the presence of gay and lesbian Catholics. "People come because this is a very spiritual event. We hope we can maintain that and that the church will minister to us in a very loving way." Nani Stewart, another member, also sounded optimistic. Gays on Catholic Hill would still have a special Mass to attend, she said. A third Dignity member, Ken Van Dyke, sounded a caution: "If there was a change toward more hard-line church teaching about homosexuality, then it would be a crisis."

Inside St. Joe's, all the priests who had served the chapter celebrated the Mass. The gay Seattle Men's Chorus pointedly sang "We Are a Family." Dignity's officers ceremoniously returned the keys they had been using to enter the church to set up for Masses. Then, at dusk, priests and Dignity members alike followed the processional crucifix out the nave and onto the street. The curtain on the years-long struggle had—at least temporarily—fallen.[44]

Two weeks later, on July 24, both Hunthausen and Murphy would attend the first Mass to be sponsored by the archdiocese's new office of gay and lesbian ministry, to be headed by a priest named Jerry Stanley. Hunthausen delivered the homily. In it, he would say that "from our point of view, the teaching of the church must be the starting point from which we try to understand the experience of gay and lesbian Christians."[45] That stood in contrast to a different form of reasoning: discerning the experience of gay Christians in order to shape church teachings. Unfortunately for homosexuals, Cardinal Ratzinger had now defined the church teachings.

In sixteen years, the Seattle chapter of Dignity had both succeeded and failed. The local ministry to homosexuals had been transformed. Gays and lesbians had become more visible in the social geography of Catholic Hill. Dignity's efforts, along with those occurring in other churches, had shaken the religious conversation in Seattle into at least acknowledging gay and lesbian concerns. But, among the Catholics, Rome had painfully trumped with dogma. The only comfort was that, for the moment, pastoral ministry was out of Wuerl's hands and back in the control of a friendly archbishop.