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**CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND VIGILS TO OCCUR DURING NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS MEETING IN NOVEMBER IN D.C.**

Dignity/USA joins Soulforce in Radical Action to Hold Catholic Church Accountable for Spiritual Violence Against Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals

**SOULFORCE - DIGNITY/USA PRESS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 19, 2000  
Contact: Laura Montgomery Rutt, Media Coordinator  
Cell: 717-951-7712

**Washington, DC** - On November 12-14, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) individuals, and their families, friends and allies from all over the United States will join together in Washington, D.C. to protest the exclusionary policies of the Catholic Church toward GLBT Catholics, to ask the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) to STOP SPIRITUAL VIOLENCE against sexual and gender minorities, and support the inclusion of GLBT Catholics into all aspects of church life.

Dignity/USA, the oldest and largest independent national lay movement of GLBT Catholics, families, and friends, and Soulforce, an interfaith network of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender individuals and their families, friends, and allies, committed to applying the principles of nonviolent resistance as taught by Gandhi and King to the liberation of sexual and gender minorities, have joined their formidable voices to confront the NCCB.

Additionally, Equal Partners in Faith, a national network of religious leaders committed to diversity and equality has joined as a cosponsor of the event and is helping to host the trainings at National City Christian Church.

"The anti-homosexual teachings of the Roman Catholic Church have tragic consequences not just in the lives of Roman Catholics, but in the lives of millions of God's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender children around the world," stated Mel White, co-founder of Soulforce. "We are holding the churches accountable." Soulforce was involved in non-violent civil disobedience actions at several national denominational meetings this summer.

Hundreds of people, including prominent Catholics and Civil Rights leaders from the 60s, will be joining with Soulforce and Dignity/USA in silent vigil as a persistent and visible presence outside the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, 400 Michigan Avenue NE, on Monday, November 13, from 3:30 - 6pm as Bishops and dignitaries from all over the world are gathering to celebrate Mass.

On Tuesday morning from 9am - noon, those same people will return to the Shrine in a nonviolent protest and civil disobedience against church policies of exclusion. Soulforce and Dignity/USA are demanding an apology for the oppression of GLBT people the church has caused, and the establishment of a bishop's committee to engage in dialogue with GLBT Catholics. It is anticipated that this protest will culminate in the arrest of over 100 GLBT Catholics and allies from a myriad of faith traditions.

In a letter to Dignity members, Mary Louise Cervone, President of Dignity/USA said, "Through our actions, we are seeking an end to the teachings that demean and exclude us from full participation in our church as whole and holy people, without having to hide or deny who we are."

Currently, Dignity members are prohibited from meeting on Catholic property in virtually all dioceses throughout the country, and in many places, bishops have forbidden priests from celebrating Mass for Dignity, thereby effectively banning them from Eucharist. Additionally, the Catholic Church spends hundreds of thousands of dollars to support anti-gay legislation that denies GLBT people their civil rights.

Letters of support have come from prominent Catholics such as John McNeill a former Jesuit priest, expelled and silenced for his pro-gay theological writings; Michael Harank, a nationally known Catholic Worker; and Franciscan Father Richard Rohr, founder of The Center for Action and Contemplation, in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Personal interviews can be made in advance by calling Laura Montgomery Rutt at 717-951-7712. For more information on Soulforce or to register for the action, see <http://www.soulforce.org/dcapp.html> or Dignity/USA at <http://www.dignityusa.org>.

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