

Subj: **Finessing Conflict on Homosexuality**  
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#### RELIGION JOURNAL

Finessing Conflict on Homosexuality

By GUSTAV NIEBUHR

en weeks ago, the Vatican ordered an American priest and a nun, the Rev. Robert Nugent and Sister Jeannine Gramick, known in Roman Catholic circles for their ministry to homosexuals, to halt that work.

The decision by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the body responsible for safeguarding church teachings, said the two had allowed "errors" to creep into their discussions of what the church says about homosexuality. In particular, the congregation said Father Nugent and Sister Gramick had not emphasized the church's position that homosexual acts are "intrinsically disordered" and evil.

Father Nugent made his response known immediately. On July 13, when the directive was made public, Father Nugent said he would abide by it. He later said he would interpret the directive narrowly so that he could speak publicly about his former ministry and about the Vatican investigation. He did so in an academic forum in Boston in August.

Sister Gramick had kept her intentions to herself, saying she needed time to reflect and to consult officials in her religious order, the Baltimore Province of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

This week, for the first time, she responded publicly. In a telephone interview yesterday, she said she would also abide by the directive, but she would work to get it rescinded.

Sister Gramick called upon "the wider church to come up with creative and collaborative ways to rectify what I perceive and many perceive to be an unjust directive. That's for the betterment of the whole church."

She said she was concerned that the directive would hurt the church's credibility, particularly among parishioners.

"Ultimately, what is most beneficial for lesbian and gay people is to be included and welcomed in the Catholic community at all levels," she said.

Sister Gramick also put her thoughts in writing, in a long, nuanced statement that she released on Thursday.

"The spirit of Jesus impels me to try to show lesbian and gay persons the loving, compassionate face of God and our church," she wrote.

She wrote that while her passive acceptance of the directive offered "no benefits to lesbian and gay Catholics and their parents," it would be "more beneficial to minister on their behalf with the blessing of church leadership than without it."

Because of that, she wrote, she would work within the church to get the decision reconsidered.

What she would like, she said, is for all Catholics — including theologians, canon lawyers and biblical scholars — to discuss issues related to the directive, like its impact on homosexuals, and what the church teaches about homosexuality.

Like Father Nugent, Sister Gramick said the Vatican had not technically silenced them but rather had prohibited them from continuing to minister to Catholics who are homosexual. In that, she said, she saw a certain leeway to continue a public presence.

"I am going to speak to anyone who invites me to speak on the issues," she said, adding that she has been invited to a forum on Oct. 11 at DePaul University in Chicago.

"It's an academic lecture," she said. "I will speak about the case and the implications of the case."

Sister Gramick also said that both she and Father Nugent were allowed to write, although the directive specified that they must seek approval from their religious superiors before publication. (A statement about the case, written by both of them, is scheduled to be published by the Jesuit magazine "America" in its Oct. 9 issue, officials at the magazine said.)

In the meantime, Sister Gramick said she was encouraged by the way the church resolved a recent case involving a Catholic theologian in South Asia.

The Rev. Tissa Balasuriya, a priest in Sri Lanka, had been excommunicated by the Vatican in January 1997 as punishment for his writings on salvation and the Virgin Mary. But the excommunication order was lifted 14 months later after mediation by church authorities in Sri Lanka and the priest's religious order.

"That was lifted," Sister Gramick said, "so that gives us hope."

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