

WORLD & NATION

Vatican bars priest, nun from gay/lesbian ministry

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has permanently barred Father Robert Nugent and Sister Jeannine Gramick "from any pastoral work involving homosexual persons."

A public notification released at the Vatican July 13 said the two Americans, who have been engaged in joint gay and lesbian ministry since the early 1970s, advanced "doctrinally unacceptable" positions "regarding the intrinsic evil of homosexual acts and the objective disorder of the homosexual inclination." They have been under a Vatican investigation since 1988.

Father Nugent in a statement said his superior general called him to Rome and informed him of the decision before it was published.

"As a son of the church, a presbyter and a member of a religious congregation with a vow of obedience, I accepted the decision of the CDF and expressed my intention to implement it accordingly," he said.

The congregation said its public noti-

fication, personally approved by Pope John Paul II, was necessary "for the good of the Catholic faithful."

The "errors and ambiguities" promoted by the priest and nun "have caused confusion among the Catholic people and have harmed the community of the church," it said.

It also declared the two "ineligible, for an undetermined period, for any office in their respective religious institutes."

Father Nugent, 62, is a Salvatorian priest. Sister Gramick, 57, is a School Sister of Notre Dame.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the doctrinal congregation, and Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone, its secretary, signed the notification.

Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza of Galveston-Houston, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a separate statement July 13 stressed that the Vatican ban was imposed because of "serious deficiencies in their writings and pastoral activities ... not because it was a ministry to homosexuals as such."

He said the U.S. bishops "share a commitment to this ministry. ... All Catholics facing serious moral questions deserve our care and respect as brothers and sisters in the Lord. Those with homosexual inclinations deserve this care and respect no less than any others."

Bishop Fiorenza also expressed a "personal hope that Sister Gramick and Father Nugent can find the way to express their acceptance of the church's teaching on homosexuality."

"This decision was reached after nearly 12 years of dialogue with Sister Gramick and Father Nugent," he said. "This dialogue began with a commission, appointed in 1988 and chaired by Cardinal Adam Maida (of Detroit), to examine criticism that, in their ministry to homosexual persons, they did not fully and accurately present the teaching of the church on homosexuality."

He said the long time taken to reach a decision on the case "indicates that these disciplinary measures were not taken lightly." It is the obligations of church authori-



Reuters/CNS

Vacation blessing

Pope John Paul II reaches from his car window to bless a child bearing flowers in Les Combes, Italy, July 10. The pope was on a two-week vacation in the mountainous region.

ties "to discern what is or is not faithful to the teaching handed on by the Lord to the apostles," he added.

Father Nugent and Sister Gramick first became involved in gay and lesbian ministry in Philadelphia in 1971. In 1977 they co-founded New Ways Ministry, with headquarters near Washington, and began giving frequent workshops on gay and lesbian ministry around the country.

They co-directed New Ways Ministry until 1983, when Cardinal (then Archbishop) James A. Hickey of Washington asked their superiors to remove them because he believed they distorted church teaching on homosexuality. New Ways Ministry continues to exist as an unofficial, Catholic-oriented ministry.

Three times between 1977 and 1988, at the request of the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, then called the Congregation for Religious, the Salvatorians and School Sisters of Notre Dame undertook internal studies of Father Nugent's and Sister Gramick's work.

It was that congregation which also instituted the fourth investigation in 1988, appointing Cardinal Maida to head a commission to study their writings. Serving

with the cardinal were Msgr. James J. Mulligan, a moral theologian, pastor and director of the Diocese of Allentown, Pa., and Janet Smith, an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Dallas and a specialist in human life and sexual morality issues.

The commission, which submitted its report to Rome in 1995, found "serious deficiencies ... incompatible with the fullness of Christian morality" and recommended disciplinary action.

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life turned the entire case over to the doctrinal congregation in 1995 because "the problems presented by the authors were primarily of a doctrinal nature," the notification said.

It said the doctrinal congregation then "undertook another attempt at resolution by inviting them to respond unequivocally to certain questions regarding their position on the morality of homosexual acts and on the homosexual inclination."

It said their responses "demonstrated a clear conceptual understanding of the church's teaching on homosexuality but refrained from professing any adherence to that teaching."

Catholic Courier (USPS 135-580) Vol. 110 No. 41, July 15, 1999

Published weekly except the last Thursday in December.

Subscription rates: single copy, 75¢; one-year subscription in U.S., \$20.00; Canada and foreign \$20.00 plus postage. Offices: 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624, 716/328-4340. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, N.Y.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.

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