

PAPAL CRITICS AND DISSIDENTS

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Last week, Pope Francis relieved Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler, Texas of his duties. Though no reason was given, it is widely believed that the pope was not happy with the bishop's criticisms of him. But when it comes to those who have publicly denounced the teachings of the Catholic Church, they are received with open arms.

On October 17, Pope Francis welcomed Catholic dissidents who have previously been condemned by U.S. cardinals and bishops. He met for almost an hour with Sister Jeannine Gramick, who, along with Fr. Robert Nugent, founded New Ways Ministry (NWM) in 1977; it is a radical pro-homosexual group. She was wearing a habit for the photo-op, something she rarely does.

After the meeting, Gramick praised the pope for his "openness" to same-sex blessings.

Sr. Gramick was best friends with the most notorious serial child rapist priest in American history, Fr. Paul Shanley. She credited him with having "motivated her to activism." More telling, after Shanley's predatory behavior was made public, she said she "grieved for the man I had not seen in almost 20 years, but whose principles and whose advocacy for the downtrodden I had applauded for three decades." That he molested the downtrodden didn't seem to matter.

Journalist Maureen Orth (who was married to "Meet the Press" host Tim Russert) ripped Gramick for never once speaking to any of Shanley's victims.

Fr. James Martin, who was given a prominent position at the Synod on Synodality in Rome—at the request of the pope—said in 2017 that he would like to "canonize" Gramick.

Gramick has long been a thorn in the side of the Catholic Church. After the publication of a book by her and Nugent, *Building Bridges: Gay and Lesbian Reality and the Catholic Church*, they were investigated by the Vatican in 1998. It was determined that there were “serious deficiencies in their writings and pastoral activities, which were incompatible with the fullness of Christian morality.”

Pope Francis did not meet with Gramick out of the blue. In fact, he commended this rogue entity at the end of 2021. At that time, I said he had been manipulated. It is now clear that I was wrong.

After the pope spoke kindly about NWM in a note to Gramick, I learned that the Vatican listed it on its resource page for the Synod.

Consequently, on December 15, 2021 I wrote to Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, about the propriety of providing a link to the NWM webinar on synodality.

In my letter, I recounted that in 1999 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, issued a document detailing how Sister Gramick and Fr. Nugent of NWM had been sanctioned by two major Church bodies for their public misrepresentations of Church teachings on sexuality.

Ratzinger wrote that in 1984, “James Cardinal Hickey, the Archbishop of Washington, following the failure of a number of attempts at clarification, informed them [NWM] that they could no longer undertake their activities in that Archdiocese. At the same time, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life ordered them to separate themselves totally and completely from New Ways Ministry, adding that they were not to exercise any apostolate without faithfully presenting the Church’s teaching regarding

the evil of homosexual acts.”

He then offered evidence of the many attempts by Church officials to persuade Gramick and Nugent to abide by Church teachings on this subject. He concluded that they “are permanently prohibited from any pastoral work involving homosexual persons and are ineligible, for an undetermined period, for any office in their respective religious institutes.”

Three years later, the new head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone, wrote that “New Ways Ministry does not promote the authentic teaching of the Catholic Church.”

Also in 2002, Archbishop Thomas Kelly of Louisville told organizers of the group’s conference that they should not celebrate the Eucharist at a NWM event. Following suit in 2007 was St. Paul-Minneapolis Archbishop Harry Flynn: he barred NWM’s national conference from celebrating the Eucharist.

In 2010, Cardinal Francis George, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, stated that he can assure Catholics that “in no manner is the position proposed by New Ways Ministry in conformity with Catholic teaching and in no manner is this organization authorized to speak on behalf of the Catholic Church or to identify itself as a Catholic organization.”

In 2011, Cardinal Donald Wuerl of the Washington Archdiocese, and chairman of the Committee on Doctrine, joined with Oakland Bishop Salvatore Cordileone, and chairman of the bishops’ Ad Hoc Committee on the Defense of Marriage, issuing an affirmation of Cardinal George’s denunciation of NWM.

This prompted me to ask Grech, “Were all the senior members of the Catholic Church wrong about NWM? Or is the decision to welcome them to the synodal process wrong? They can’t both be right.”

He never replied. We now know why.

The disparate treatment afforded Bishop Strickland and NWM dissidents is as clear as a bell.