2007


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HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC CHURCH:

By

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A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of Religion
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded:
Fall Semester, 2007

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
When I was an undergraduate considering graduate school, my mentor warned me that pursuing advanced studies could at times be an isolating and lonely experience. Luckily, those days have been few and far between as advisors and colleagues created a unique community that extended beyond the boundaries of campus, spilling into research and extracurricular pursuits.

I am foremost grateful for Sr. Jeannine Gramick and Fr. Robert Nugent’s willingness to open their lives and files to my prying curiosity. As a non-Catholic, heterosexual religious studies scholar, I neither fit the mold for the typical Catholic historian nor a scholar interested in LGBT history. But like Gramick and Nugent, I attempt to fashion a narrative from a unique perspective. I am deeply appreciative of their willingness to let me try.

Archivist Phil Runkel at Marquette University and Mark Bowman, project coordinator of the virtual LGBT Religious Archive Network, were invaluable sources for this project. Archivist Rich Wandel met me after hours at the LGBT Community Center in New York City and provided not only access to archives, but also his own account of a stint in a religious community and his participation in Dignity/New York. Mike and Hope Nelson Pope provided extravagant hospitality while on research trips in D.C. Hope literally went the extra mile(s) to get me to the airport on time.

Professors John Corrigan, Amy Koehlinger, and Amanda Porterfield have been willing conversation partners throughout my graduate career and particularly during this project. I am grateful they have given this shy, quiet student time to develop her voice while also prodding her to speak more loudly. I look forward to future conversations.

I count colleagues Kelly Baker, Mike Pasquier, and Michael Gueno as the most precious of friends. Their friendships along with those of their spouses have made memories of the years in graduate school sparkle with fondness. I surely will miss the camaraderie experienced in the classroom and laughter at the local pub. I anxiously anticipate reunions.

When I was a young girl, adoptive grandparents Osie and the late Delbert Winget set high expectations for me. Unbeknownst to them, they also taught me that life is best lived when expectations are shattered and when one loves in unexpected ways. In an abstract sense, they led me to this project. My family, Mr. Alan and Dr. Melanie Williams, provided unending encouragement and a place to seek refuge away from the confines of my office. Most importantly, they inspired a love of learning and continue to demonstrate how to be life-long students. Steve Bryant and I met just as I was embarking on graduate studies. As partners we
have waded through the ups and downs of graduate school together, and his love and support is beyond measure. I am deeply appreciative that he has provided me space to be creative—even joining me to wield a sledgehammer to a renovation once in a while. Thank you.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGLO Archdiocesan Gay and Lesbian Outreach
CCGCR Catholic Coalition for Gay Civil Rights
CCL Conference of Catholic Lesbians School Sisters of Notre Dame
CICLSAL Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life
GLF Gay Liberation Front
LGBT Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual
OSV Our Sunday Visitor
NCR National Catholic Reporter
NCAN National Coalition of American Nuns
NCCB National Conference of Catholic Bishops
NWM New Ways Ministry
CDF Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
CRSI Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes
SSND School Sisters of Notre Dame
SIGMA Sisters in Gay Ministry
SDS Society of the Divine Savior (Salvatorians)
ABSTRACT

“Homosexuality and the American Catholic Church: Reconfiguring the Silence, 1971-1999” examines how during the latter decades of the 20th century gay and lesbian Catholic voices and reconciling ministries emerged from a specific and confusing social, cultural, and religious climate. My investigation documents an important chapter in the religious history of the LGBT community in the U.S., one in which the agency and resourcefulness of gay and lesbian Catholics stands in sharp contrast to common narratives of their victimization by the tradition’s deep homophobia. Using data collected from archives, correspondence, interviews, theological and lay Catholic journals, and newspaper reports, I construct a cultural history of a gay-affirmative Catholic ministry: New Ways Ministry (NWM). This study documents the “golden age” of gay Catholic reform, offering an important case study of how gays, lesbians, and religious actively and creatively engaged with their religious tradition.

In documenting the expansion and work of a particular, tenacious community of Catholics committed to reconciling the institutional church with the people that constitute the church, my project also discloses the personal, social, and theological resources that buttressed the community’s ability to withstand the pressure directed at them. Together the co-directors of NWM, Sister Jeannine Gramick and Father Robert Nugent, navigated levels of the institutional church hierarchy, creating a language of reconciliation and setting a specific platform for LGBT issues within the church for nearly three decades. By focusing on education and civil rights issues more than the theological development of Catholic sexual ethics, NWM invited priests, theologians, bishops, religious women and men to join an assimilationist, liberal model for social reform. Avoiding radical protest and staking out a pragmatic moderate position between gay Catholics and the magisterium, this community of Catholics saw much hope for inventive political action and effective change in the church. This study explores the possibilities and limits of their work for reconciliation in the decades following the Second Vatican Council while demonstrating how sexuality (and to an extent gender) were reconstituted in the process. This project challenges American religious historical narratives that have overlooked conversations of sexuality, gender, same-sex love, and queer desire as important factors to the cultural history of 20th century American Catholicism and encourages historians of LGBT culture to reassess the role of religious movements in queer history.
INTRODUCTION

The New Ways Ministry

The issue of same-sex love and desire is by no means separate from a vast, complicated history of the Catholic Church’s general teachings on sexuality. However, during the late 1960s and through mid-1980s, gay and lesbian Catholic voices and gay-positive ministries emerged from a specific and often confusing social, cultural, and religious climate. By the mid-1960s and early 1970s newly politicized gays and lesbians began to mobilize within the Catholic Church and many Protestant denominations. Within the American Catholic tradition, the co-founders of New Ways Ministry—Sister Jeannine Gramick, of the Schools Sisters of Notre Dame, and Reverend Robert Nugent, a Salvatorian priest—urged Catholics to recognize, understand, and appreciate sexual diversity. Their ministry provided pastoral counseling, social justice activism, and strategies to negotiate institutional church authority. Gramick and Nugent participated in a growing gay and lesbian rights movement by serving as an educational and organizational resource for pastors, theologians, religious, laity and activists engaged in Catholic gay and lesbian ministry.¹

The story of New Ways Ministry (NWM) is unique in that Gramick and Nugent walked a fine line to stay within the church’s traditional teachings on sexuality while opening up dialogue for serious challenges and critiques of the church’s traditional position. It was hoped that NWM would be in direct conversation with priests, religious, and clerical authorities in order to enlighten church leaders on valuable, but often ignored experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics. To do so NWM promoted a type of pastoral sensitivity and agenda to speak out against explicit and implicit violence against gays and lesbians—even violence done by the church. Because this community of Catholics occupied an intermediate position, detractors accused Gramick and Nugent of promoting ambiguous teachings on homosexuality. This position reflected the larger culture of gay Catholics who discovered church teachings and their own experiences to be in direct conflict. If gay Catholics had a love/hate relationship with the church, Gramick and Nugent had a mission to repair the rapport. The pair was optimistic that gay and lesbian Catholics would and could love the church and in turn have the church understand and love them with full acceptance. To Gramick and Nugent, their work was a bridge ministry between gay and lesbian Catholics, their families, and multiple layers in the church.
NWM’s moderate and reconciling vision was a progressive (sometimes revisionist) position that often clashed with church officials. Gramick and Nugent’s particular conceptualization of a renewed and reformed church in the wake of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962-1965) imagined a diverse body of people embracing a pastoral church attuned to social justice.\(^2\) For Gramick and Nugent being pastoral was to demonstrate an inclusive and empathetic model of leadership that also respected consciences and experiences of people that make up the church. Such a vision threatened institutional church power and authority, which became obsessed with regulating sexual ethics in the last four decades of the 20th century. NWM entered the postconciliar conversation determined to set a moderate, yet progressive tone. Their ministry fit into a larger culture of progressive Catholics who attempted to reshape and define the American Catholic Church. Their ministry also fit into a culture of gay and lesbian Catholics who wanted to reconcile their sexuality and Catholic identities. All were caught in a confusing time when no one could agree on what “being Catholic” meant.

While Timothy Potts’s assessment of homosexuality and the church during Vatican II is accurate (“The Second Vatican Council said nothing about homosexuality”), his reasoning for the silence is erroneous. Potts assumes “that very little was being said about it anywhere else in the mid-1960s.” Not only were a few Catholic theologians and writers beginning to think about the issues, but numerous discussions were happening in Protestant religious circles as well. Shortly thereafter, Catholics borrowing from these resources developed a distinctly Catholic approach to gay and lesbian issues.\(^3\) Religious studies professor Mark Jordan’s exploration of Catholic clerical culture and the intended silence surrounding homosexuality and homoeroticism in *Silence of Sodom* is accurate and illuminating. In a work that investigates the performance of religious identities, Christian teachings on homosexuality, and theological rhetoric, Jordan asks how the Catholic Church can be both homophobic and homoerotic at the same time. Official church documents and teachings prevent any serious or meaningful discussion of same-sex love, therefore subsuming and silencing a discussion of homosexuality within homophobic church structure and power. Despite the silence, Jordan attests that in order to understand modern homosexuality, one must understand Catholic homosexuality. To understand Catholic homosexuality, one must understand the homoerotic priestly enclaves and male religious orders.\(^4\)

During the late 1960s through the early 1980s there was a reasonable amount of discussion on the topic. However, silence did not characterize all of Roman Catholic culture.
While my study does not explicitly focus on homoeroticism and male clerical culture, I do demonstrate that both men and women religious challenged the reticence surrounding homosexuality. Identifiers such as “Catholic” and “gay” were not necessarily incongruous, and in fact, some religious dedicated their lives to setting the tone for inclusive discussion. If according to Sr. Gramick, there “arose a good deal of ferment in Catholic circles between 1975 and 1985 around the issue of homosexuality,” how was the sentiment developing and what sustained or hindered it? Historians have yet to catalogue Catholic gay and lesbian movements into a cohesive, comprehensive narrative. The narrative that I propose challenges the assumed silence regarding homosexuality in Catholic culture.

My investigation documents an important chapter in the religious history of the LGBT community in the U.S., one in which the agency and creativity of gay and lesbian Catholics stands in sharp contrast to common narratives of their victimization by the tradition’s deep homophobia. I close the narrative at the historical moment when NWM came under harsh scrutiny from Vatican officials. Gramick and Nugent were subjected to strong pressure to recant their reconciling position and affirm church teaching that homosexuals were “disordered” (pressure they successfully resisted). As such, it documents the “golden age” of gay Catholic reform, offering an important case study of gays, lesbians, and religious actively and creatively engaged with their religious tradition. In documenting the expansion and work of a particular, tenacious community of Catholics committed to reconciling the institutional church with the people that constitute the church, my project also discloses the personal, social, and theological resources that buttressed that community’s ability to withstand the pressure directed at them.

“Catholic” and/or “Gay”?

By taking New Ways Ministry as a portal into Catholic life, we can better understand how religiosity in a post-Vatican II Catholic culture (1965 to the present) was a practice in negotiating what it “meant to be Catholic.” Questions, confusions, and issues imbued in Catholic sexual ethics and teachings collided with evolving notions of sexuality and sexual identities in broader culture to create contentious Catholic identities. Although influenced by secular social movements, politics, and science, Gramick and Nugent worked within a distinct Catholic culture to extend their postconciliar pastoral vision to working for gay rights. In turn, they creatively negotiated a series of dichotomies in late 20th century Catholic culture. The clash between an obvious heterogeneous local Catholic culture and the universal church has a particularly poignant
and long history in America, but the few decades following Vatican II make for an exceptional historical moment for the tension between the particular and universal. Like other progressive postconciliar Catholics, Gramick and Nugent’s work and protest within their Catholic culture danced between orthodoxy and reform, assimilatory and radical visions of the future, opaque and transparent negotiations with church authorities, loving but also hating the church, and living out both a prophetic, but what could also be considered a heretical ministry. The subsequent five chapters investigate these dichotomies that shaped postconciliar life and investigate gay and lesbian ministries’ positioning in the wider church.

What makes the story of NWM a particularly valuable study for enriching our understanding of this cultural period is that Gramick and Nugent managed to maintain their controversial ministry over several decades. They successfully resisted Vatican interference and impedance at a time when other controversial issues (women’s ordination, married priests, and dialogue on abortion) were stifled. Although Gramick and Nugent claimed to be insiders within a broader, progressive movement of late 20th century Catholicism (a moment that especially included ministries to other stigmatized groups), powerful church leaders at the highest levels of the Vatican refused to listen to their pleas for recognition as a legitimate ministry. It shall be clear in the following chapters that Gramick and Nugent were neither insiders nor outsiders. Instead, they were both—resting in the shared space in between. To be Catholic in the late 20th century was to be in a process of continually negotiating “what it meant to be Catholic.” Yet by resolving to be a part of the negotiating process in these potentially rupturable intersections, Gramick and Nugent were rarely led to literal reconciliation with church leaders. Instead they cast reconciliation in distinctive Catholic spiritual terms. They depended on God’s mercy and providence to correct injustice, but anticipated suffering, waiting, and frustrating church politics in the interlude. Catholic gay and lesbian ministries broke the silence proving “Catholic” and “gay” were not antagonistic, but in practical terms, not reconciled identities either.

For Gramick and Nugent the church evolved, adapted, and changed over time, especially in the unique context for experimentation in postconciliar life. It was not an unchanging, timeless institution but rather one open and unfinished, constructed by a historical and present moment. The question became, “How does one best usher in change?” NWM and other gay and lesbian ministries such as Dignity struggled with the tensions between assimilationist and more radical social strategies, as did the larger secular GLBT movement. Bounded by their Catholic culture,
Gramick and Nugent worked to incorporate Catholic gay and lesbians into acceptance by the larger church, but they also envisioned a radical future of massive structural change for the church. The continual negotiation of sexual and religious identities also speaks to the larger history of American religion as narrative of fluctuating insiders and outsiders. Historians often have used insider/outsider categories to frame American Catholicism, especially in relation to immigrant and ethnic histories. I use similar categories but extend the analyses to a broader world of American Catholicism in a postconciliar culture fraught with a myriad of confusing social, personal, spiritual and sexual experiences. NWM represented a countercultural movement subversive of traditional Catholic sexual ethics. This reconciling ministry, however, also affirmed a particular understanding of divine love, pastoral care, and healing indebted to Gramick and Nugent’s progressive interpretation of Catholic theology and life. While NWM and other reconciling groups shared a common Catholic culture, those that opposed them also claimed a Catholic culture, but interpreted love, sexuality and justice in radically dissimilar ways. These incongruities made “bridge building” an improbable goal, unless these groups reconciled to persist in reconciling—a praxis that has no foreseeable end.

Gramick and Nugent worked to reconcile religious and sexual identities, an inherently stabilizing project that blurred the conflict and difference between the two. At the same time, these identities were “forged in combat” and subjected to a destabilizing tension that left both religious and sexual bodies and identities open, un-ended, and fragmented. In other words, Gramick and Nugent understood that reconciling, understanding, but also contesting religious and sexual identities happened in public and private discourse. What did it mean to be both Catholic and gay or even a religious or minister involved in gay ministry? It meant to seek reconciliation but exist in a state of continuous irresolution.

In some religious circles throughout the 1970s and 1980s, there was an opening up about sexuality, identity movements, and strategies for social protest. Catholics were very much a part of the discussion and action. They were caught up in debating, experimenting, and imagining the future of postconciliar church life, and framed their participation in gay and lesbian protest within distinct religious worldviews. It is crucial to understand NWM as instancing the degree to which understandings of sexuality (and to an extent gender) were so notably in flux. Scholars have had particular interest in how Catholic religious professionals behave and respond to church ideas. Many have investigated feminism’s influence on women religious and have attempted to
account for the decline in the numbers of women entering the convent or why many sisters left religious life in the decades after Vatican II.\textsuperscript{11} Others have pursued priest studies, focusing on the debates about married priests or the challenges of a living a celibate life.\textsuperscript{12} I want to open the conversation to incorporate other people and events. Postconciliar Catholicism reinterpreted, questioned, and reified traditional notions of sexuality and gender in public and private church life. The history of NWM, Gramick, and Nugent demonstrates that sexuality became the critical juncture of pastoral, social justice, and leadership issues in American Roman Catholicism. Sex and gender controversies acquired a prominent place in late 20\textsuperscript{th} century discussions about Catholic life, but the investigation of same-sex love and Catholic gay and lesbian protest is an alternative, fresh way to investigate the decades following Vatican II.

The post-Vatican II era was framed by experimentation, ambiguity, and irresolution. Catholic culture produced and reified queer spaces – spaces that critiqued normalizing ways of knowing and being Catholic. In these spaces Catholics negotiated the dichotomies.\textsuperscript{13} A sub-theme of this project is to examine how queer theory perspectives (contemporary theories that reject stable sexual and religious identities) complicate the investigation of identities within religious history. For example, what does it means to identify as a gay or lesbian Catholic involved in activist religious organizations or reconciling movements like NWM? Part of the contemporary queer project involves a radical rethinking of subjectivity, sexual difference, and representation.\textsuperscript{14} The language of god-created naturalness as well as established religious and sexual identities do not, however, fit into a current destabilizing queer theoretical paradigm. NWM’s vision is queer in the sense that Gramick and Nugent’s thought and praxis critiques traditional teachings on Catholic sexual ethics, but at the same time such groups walk a fine line between assimilation, liberal, and destabilizing liberatory social goals for their religious work—living in the ambiguous intersections of religious and sexual identities.

\textbf{Catholic Voices in a Social and Cultural History}

Although my study focuses on contemporary religious movements, my method is primarily historical. I am interested in “what happened” between 1971, the beginning of Gramick’s work with Philadelphian gay Catholics, and 1986, the year the Vatican released the “Letter to Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons.” By focusing on LGBT movements, Catholic leaders, and individuals shaping but also those opposing movements, I intend for this story to be comprised of collective and individual voices that constitute a social
and cultural history. I want to enable understanding of religion as a cultural force that constitutes meaning and identities, and understand how diverse groups of people within a tradition create and resist structures of authority. To do this I incorporate ethnographic sensibilities into my historical research.

There is a wealth of literary sources that speak to the connection between Catholic spirituality and sexuality. Such works typically are autobiographical and focus on the physical and emotional experience of bodies: sex and love become the ultimate religious experiences and experiments in self-awareness. These interpersonal writings also convey the author’s rejection of, frustration with, or embracement by the church. These sources on homosexuality and Catholic life differ from rhetoric emphasizing universal social justice and human rights expressed by Catholics who participated in NWM. Gramick and Nugent did not advocate publicly sharing the details of personal sexual and religious experimentation as many gay Catholic writers had done. Instead they relegated these tales of burgeoning self-expression to private counseling. At the same time, however, NWM relied on personal accounts of discrimination, oppression, and struggle to convey their public messages of better pastoral care attuned to the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics as well as their larger mission for social justice.

Beyond the emotional voices in self-confessing autobiographies or personal narratives, I understand that trips to the archives and engaging in fieldwork are both forms of “encounter.” Ethnographic methods have introduced layers of theoretical complexity to historical analysis, and ethnography has challenged how historians practice and write research. For example, I not only encounter the voices of my subjects in the archives, but also face to face in conversation, correspondence, codes of conduct, and mutual performance. This project is not without ethnographic sensitivities, especially throughout the writing process. Recognizing that all knowledge is situated and self-reflexive, fieldwork locates the researcher and writer in self-conscious social and geographic positioning. Nonetheless, ethnography is not the answer to every methodological quest (nor this project). A work does not have to be dominated by ethnography to highlight the ethnographic. In fact, I do not dedicate eighteen months to two years living and working with Gramick and Nugent, but I do produce a history with ethnographic sensibilities sensitive to the experiential and empathetic.
There are problems of interpersonal and intersubjective ethnographic methods when applied to religious history. Some historians are weary of the interactive, creative, and subjective methods of ethnographic sensibilities. Additionally, what if the analysis documents miniscule change (i.e. progress) over time—change being the foundation of historical analysis? What if in my case, the subjects I study disagree with the theoretical destabilizing framework of queer history? How do I negotiate ways of viewing gay identities and gay experiences? It is at this juncture where ethnography and history collaborate in my method. The relationship and interaction between the ethnographer and informant opens the possibility to bring new representation and meaning to the narrative. Researchers can relate to the world of one’s subject, as well as lean how to view the two in relation, moving back and forth to see how each organizes and experiences reality.  

As a result of this hybridization, my voice is present in the descriptive and interpretative narrative. Using Gramick and Nugent’s voices, as well as those of their supporters and detractors, I seek to understand how Catholic sexual and to an extent gender identities were so much in flux in the final decades of the 20th century. I am critical of NWM’s moderate, reconciling position when I cannot trace and measure progress as the ministry’s supporters do, but I do not discount its directors interesting positioning and religious/social vision in Catholic culture either. Just as Kristy Nabhan-Warren in her study of the Ruiz family, Mary’s Ministries, and Catholicism in South Phoenix attempts to portray her subjects “in a way that illuminates their place within contemporary Catholicism in the United States,” I, too, want to situate the story of Gramick, Nugent, and New Ways Ministry in a particular place and time in American Catholic history.  

I am aware of the differences that separate me from Sr. Gramick and Fr. Nugent and the potential for interpretive gaps that could impede my analysis, but I am similarly interested in liberal religious voices in the unique social and religious American climate in the 1970s. Perhaps this is why I am empathetic to progressive issues within Catholicism, but I do not want to champion the liberal or progressive. Instead, I want to hold this relatively contemporary history of progressive Catholicism to scrutiny and analysis in order to understand the contested meanings of sexuality, identity, and power within post-Vatican II American Catholic culture. I say this not intending for this project to be an interpersonal confession, but only to state that I am
aware of the complexity of my relationship as a historical researcher to my living subjects as well as their history in the archives.

**Scholarship on LGBT Religious Movements**

The expansive bibliographies of same-sex desire and religion cram library shelves. Nevertheless, work produced on LGBT religious movements has been limited to autobiographies, theological ethics, defenses or rejections of church doctrine, and a smattering of sociological and historical studies. The literature thus far has primarily focused on biblical interpretation, the homophobic rhetoric of the religious right, or LGBT churches and denominations, such as the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. My investigation is limited to gay and lesbian ministries and activist individuals within Roman Catholicism in order to fill in the gaps in the work of American religionists who have overlooked lesbian and gay ministries as major social forces of reform within the American Roman Catholic Church. Sexual ethics, papal documents, and church teachings typically are included in Catholic historical narratives, but the voices of gay and lesbian Catholics and those who support them are missing. My project also combines the experiences and histories of women religious with priest studies to demonstrate how Gramick and Nugent’s distinct statuses in the church shaped their ministry in both similar and different ways. Finally, this study challenges historians interested in LGBT history and culture to take seriously the complex role of religion in gay and lesbian Catholic lives and how religion influences the narratives of LGBT history.

Over the last decade American religious historians have anxiously uncovered and recovered the voices of ordinary religious people, piecing together and understanding their quotidian religious lives in a complex culture shaped by gender, ethnicity, class, and race. In the study of Catholicism this has come in the form of research on devotionalism and immigration. My project differs from recent works on Catholicism in that I do not intend to focus on rituals or how ethnicity shapes understandings of Catholicism. Ironically, works featuring gay and lesbian Catholics are flooded with the voices of “ordinary religious people” living their religion in creative ways. Numerous autobiographies, essays, and collections by laity, religious, and former religious speak to the negotiation (sometimes reconciliation and other times rejection) of sexuality and Catholic identity. What is missing is a coherent history of the collective peoples and movements that conveys not only individual, interpersonal experience but also tells a broader, fuller history. Historians have yet to understand the fullness of queer religious lives, as
agents within a lived history and culture—agents that oftentimes have diverse lived religious and sexual identities. It is because these religious individuals and groups negotiate identities, ecclesiasticism, and reform, and in the process oftentimes normalize, even essentialize, same-sex desire within their religious traditions, that make them fascinating and important historical subjects.

During the years following the Second Vatican Council change in church teachings filtered down from the Vatican’s dictates as well as up from grassroots Catholics experimenting with what exactly it meant to bring the church into the modern world. If the modern world questioned and challenged what it meant to be a sexual human being and the nature of living relationships, the church, too, faced complicated theological, doctrinal, pastoral, and practical deliberations about love and sexuality. Writings on homosexuality range from theological debates, reactions to official church teachings, and explorations into social-scientific research, to the actual experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics. Secondary source materials documenting Catholic gay and lesbian movements are sparse. The work that does exist, however, usually was generated and/or published by Catholic gay and lesbian ministries themselves.

Discourse about homosexuality and Catholicism occurred within six general groups of people: 1) theologians, specifically moral theologians debating issues of sexuality; 2) lay, gay and lesbian Catholics who felt alienated from the church; 3) those that had left the church, maybe religion all together; 4) lay, gay and lesbian Catholics who felt at home in the church; 5) heterosexual Catholics who were often bewildered over the church’s teachings on sexuality; and 6) religious who were struggling to understand their sexuality within a same-sex, celibate context. At times these categories stand alone and at other times they are undistinguishable in their shared confusion over issues of sexuality and religion. Some, however, were responding to attempts to reconcile church teachings with real experience, emotions, and scientific developments for understanding same-sex love.

A gay or lesbian person’s reconciliation between a religious Catholic identity and sexual orientation broadly falls within three subcategories. First, one can cease being a practicing Catholic due to an irreconcilable frustration with a grudgingly stubborn religious authority. These individuals may even seek a religious alternative apart from Catholicism. Secondly, some gays and lesbians may continue to be practicing Catholics but feel alienated from the church and church teachings, thus closeted and suffering with feelings of guilt and confusion over how to
separate their sexual orientation from sexual acts. Lastly, there are Catholics who remain unabashedly Catholic in practice but who oppose selective church teachings on homosexuality. These reformers disagree with the church but insist they remain faithful Catholics while ignoring exacting church doctrine that could have negative effects on their lives. To do so they might seek alternative and affirming communities offering worship and outlets for activism with an organization such as Dignity, New Ways Ministry, or the Conference for Catholic Lesbians among others. These Catholics are advocates of reform who employ theological and social frameworks of justice and liberation, while diligently promoting “the acceptance of gay and lesbian people as full and equal members of church and society” whether through research, forums, civil rights advocacy, education on homophobia, publications, retreats, mass, or marching in parades. This study encompasses a variety of the last two categories. Organizations like NWM and Dignity hope to alleviate the pain of wounded gay and lesbian Catholics who feel alienated from the church. They organize, mobilize, and work for providing an immediate pastoral need but also for reform efforts.

Before we can understand how such movements arose and what sustained them, we must first understand how they fit into a larger religious history shaped by the Second Vatican Council’s mandate for aggiornamento, bringing the church up to date, in the fluid and often contradictory cultural and social milieu of the late 1960s through the mid-1980s.

**General Religious Context**

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962-1965) ushered in an unprecedented era for contemporary Catholic life. When the world’s bishops convened in Rome for four sessions they were given the task by Pope John XXIII to make the church more understandable and pastoral in the modern world. The excitement of the council was contagious, virtually leaving no Roman Catholic in the United States unaffected by its precedents for reform. Yet bishops, the Roman curia, and reformers did not always share the same vision. The diversity of opinion at times led to dissent. Vatican II presented particular theological challenges and social opportunities by and for the church of the socially conscious 1960s, but not without much confusion, resistance, and backlash at all levels of the church. The church asked how it was meeting people in their chaotic, often unpleasant daily lives, and in turn asked what was the church’s response to war, prejudices, and poverty that affected the people of its parishes, dioceses, and beyond. During Vatican II church leaders produced documents demonstrating the
need to address the church as living believers, people poised to enliven and discover Christ’s presence in the modern world. In other words, the church was to move from a medieval, doctrinal worldview to an encompassing pastoral vision in the last decades of the 20th century, but as we will see, church leaders interpreted what it meant to be “pastoral” in a variety of ways, especially as related to moral issues regarding sex. As Pope John XXIII led the church into uncharted ecclesiastical waters during the fall of 1962, the stirring of reform set apart the Roman Catholic Church of the contemporary era.

Vatican II set forth radical changes by redefining the church’s understanding of itself and relationship to the world, and this massive perspective modification was not without resistance. Almost immediately the tension between what Joseph Chinnici terms “the twin poles of fidelity to the tradition and innovation” developed, or more specifically how church leaders aligned both doctrinal and pastoral views in their relationships and teachings to the people of the church. If part of the pastoral self-presentation of the church involved dialogue, listening, and teaching, much of the conversation in secular and Catholic worlds involved debates over war, woman’s issues, race, sex, economics, and politics. As such, Catholic social teachings and protest have an interesting and unique history in America in the late 1960s throughout the early 1980s. In the United States church leaders with the National Conference of Catholic Bishops grappled with the social principles of human rights, liberties, and religious freedom. Sometimes the church’s social teachings in this postconciliar age were ideastically encompassing and bold. They outlined the visions in decrees such as the Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) in 1965 or later the 1971 bishop synod’s statement Justicia in Mundo (Justice in the World). But it was not simply the magisterium that prescribed the conversations on social issues, but also priests, religious (particularly women religious), and laity who viewed the social climate of the last three decades of the 20th century within a distinct Catholic perspective.

These documents contained major general convictions reflecting the church’s response to the modern world and subsequent suggested transformations. First, the church reconceptualized on the category of human dignity or individuality of a person. The church recognized the individual as an essential voice whose claims demanded attention within an oppressive society. However, an individual’s responsibility was to extend to a larger, interconnected human family where they could fellowship in full potential with other human beings. It was within the Christian community and common bond of humanity’s history that the divine will of justice and
holiness could manifest in the world. This conciliar vision focused on the commonality of humanity (Catholic and to an extent non-Catholic) their struggles, threats, concerns, and joys. Related to values of human dignity and human family, some reformers determined the church had a special advocate role to pursue justice and peace for ensuring the affirmation of certain human entitlements and human rights. Lastly, Vatican II acknowledged changing historical processes when the council recognized the church’s historical situatedness in the present era and a long time-span before. Looking to the future, the church would continue to develop how its vision manifested in the modern world and how it could aid the human wholeness of all persons and infuse justice into all human relations, but it was the precise interpretation of human wholeness and justice as applied to doctrine and morality that became difficult to define.  

The reformist vision of Vatican II was idealistic, but confusing when the council mandated reforms that greatly affected the everyday lives of Catholics, leaving many unprepared and ill-equipped for liturgical changes or renewal in religious life. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, progressive theologians continued to implement their understandings of the changes inspired and questions raised by Vatican II through additional conferences and synods. For instance, the Synod of Bishops released the document *Justice in the World* in 1971. The document called for church action “to be directed above all at those men and nations which because of various forms of oppression and because of the present character of our society are silent, indeed voiceless, victims of injustice.” Grounded in incarnational theology, the document reinforced the church’s social justice message to make Christ present in the world through all types of human relations. Many American progressivists interpreted the conciliar vision to mean the church had a responsibility to fight injustice on all levels from the threat of nuclear war to racial prejudices to economic oppression. The bishops gave confidence to individuals to “lessen injustice, to lead lives of nonviolence, and to share in love and justice the goods of the earth. Such acts of love of neighbor make God present to the world and offer the hope of renewal.”

These themes set the stage for further discussion and experimentation to live out the modernizing vision of Vatican II. During the convening years of the Second Vatican Council, Protestant religious leaders in the United States were already responding to a conversation happening in the modern world—homosexuality. On the west coast homophile political organizations such as Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis had begun secretly meeting by
the 1950s in hopes of altering public attitudes regarding “sexual deviants.” In conjunction with bar culture these small movements provided a sense of community for gays and lesbians who shared a growing, more public sense of injustice. Gays and lesbians were long familiar with physical abuse endured during bar raids, invasive patrolling by undercover cops, and violent harassment by both citizens and police. These overlooked abuses by law enforcement or cases of physical harm were injustices compounded by gays and lesbians’ fears of job loss, governmental intrusion, and the fragile state of one’s general emotional well-being.

To begin changing public opinion over issues of homosexuality and improve the status of homosexuals, the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis initiated an assimilationist agenda, carefully and cautiously educating themselves and the public about sexual variance, rather than initiating a more radical, militant approach confronting the public about homosexuality (which would come later). Efforts were directed to soliciting mental health professionals researching sexuality, targeting lawyers to help change the penal code, and providing a network of services and support for homosexuals. These early groups hoped to educate the public by holding lectures featuring social scientists that could perhaps legitimate homosexuality through their expert opinions. The goal was to be accepted into mainstream society.

The growing networks of homophile organizations were primarily composed of white upper to middle class members, but bar culture and bathhouses also provided a nexus of sexual and political communities. All, however, recognized that religion was a major force of oppression and alienation for the homosexual. By 1956 Chuck Rowland had founded the gay-specific Church of ONE Brotherhood in Los Angeles and John Eccles, an officer in the Mattachine Society in Los Angeles, had written and essay entitled “Yes, I am a Christian.” In 1960s leaders of the Old Catholic Church (an independent offshoot of the Roman Catholic Church), such as the Most Reverend Armand Constantine Whitehead, rejected the doctrine of papal infallibility and accepted gay clergy and congregants. A Congregationalist pastor began an overt pastoral ministry to gay people in New York City in 1962, and by 1964 the Council on the Religion and the Homosexual had been formed in San Francisco initiating a dialogue between the gay and lesbian community and bay area clergy.

**Homosexuality and the Church: Beginnings of Discussion**

The Catholic Church was not immune to discussions and debates over sexuality, but it did approach the subjects of bodies, love, and sex within a unique Catholic framework. The
release of Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Humane Vitae* in 1968 was not the beginning of controversial sexual ethics, but contributed to a long history of theological discussions within the church and Catholic community. The issue of homosexuality, too, grew out of the larger sexuality debate within Catholicism, Protestant denominations, and a growing secular gay and lesbian movement. Although this project focuses on historicizing religious social movements, this study considers some discussion of theological and philosophical currents. The experiences of gays and lesbians within the church influenced the theological debates, and conversely, theological debates impacted the lives of gay and lesbian Catholics in many different ways.

Thomas Thurston’s three categories of Roman Catholic thought and ethics regarding homosexuality are helpful for briefly summarizing the theological context emerging over sexual ethics after Vatican II. First, those within the traditional category include persons who uphold papal and Vatican declarations asserting *a priori* truth throughout time. From an Augustinian natural law and neo-Thomistic elaboration, the traditionalist argument against homogenital expression is justified because homosexual sex lacks the finality of reproductive functions and is considered self-indulgent. Father John Harvey’s *Courage* and writings exemplify this traditional approach calling the homosexual to celibacy.

Next, Thurston’s mediating category includes moral theologians such as Charles Curran. Curran introduced his considerations on homosexuality in 1967 when elaborating on general sexual ethics. While Curran’s work defines heterosexual relationships as normative and homosexual relationships pathological, he compromises. Curran reasons under certain circumstances homosexuality could be objectively good. For the rest of his career, Curran walked a tightrope-like mediating position, but when church authorities considered his work dangerously progressive, they threatened Curran’s academic appointment and attempted to suspend the theologian’s influence.

A few theologians and more lay Catholics went a step further than Curran and adopted what Thurston terms a revisionist approach. These reformers reject heterosexuality as normative. For instance, in 1970 the New York Jesuit and psychotherapist John J. McNeill published a series of articles on homosexuality in three issues of the *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* that surveyed overarching themes of human sexuality as morally justified through love. As opposed to the traditional position, revisionists perceived human nature (including sexuality) as not static but fluid and boundless. McNeill argued that for the church to transform its
pastoral traditionally punitive response to homosexuality, the church’s theological framework, tradition, and revelation had to change as well. For McNeill, in the ongoing processes of aggiornamento there could no longer be a dependence on natural law theology but a sincere reexamination in moral theology and moral philosophy methodologies.\textsuperscript{51} Due to his experience with pastoral and mental counseling with Catholic gays and lesbians, McNeill determined that traditional counseling models that demanded total abstinence or a conversion to heterosexuality were rarely efficacious for his homosexual clients. He blamed the church for ignoring the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics and boldly called for revisionist reform.

Progressivists–both mediators and revisionists–considered McNeill to be a seminal contributor to gay and lesbian acceptance within the American Catholic Church, and his writings served as a catalyst for further discussion on the morality of homosexual acts. McNeill’s 1970 publications received so much feedback that he thought, “the time was ripe for a full-scale, book-length study of the moral and pastoral issues of homosexuality.”\textsuperscript{52} By 1972 he had a draft of the book and began looking for publishers. McNeill spent years working on an imprimi potest, or the official approval from religious superiors for publication. Why did he go through the ordeal of seeking an imprimi potest? The Jesuit was optimistic his book would “help foster an all-out discussion on the Church’s moral understanding and pastoral practice concerning the homosexual” and he “particularly want[ed] to reach, and open up new, hopeful possibilities for all those Catholic homosexuals who are struggling to put together their dual identities as Catholics and homosexuals.”\textsuperscript{53} In the beginning of the process McNeill was patient with bureaucratic review, but his stamina eventually deteriorated. In retrospect, he wrote, “I naively assumed that by granting me an imprimi potest, the Church, in the liberating spirit that followed Vatican II, was ready and willing to reexamine its teaching on homosexuality and that approving my book for publication was the first step in that process.”\textsuperscript{54}

While McNeill worked on his book gathering reviews from theologians, making revisions, and waiting on further directives from his superiors, other revisionists, mediators, and traditionalists were contributing to an emerging discussion on homosexuality. Grassroots, revisionist Catholics were taking action before 1970. In 1969 amidst the ongoing process of postconciliar experimentation and “being church,” Father Patrick X. Nidorf, an Augustinian priest and psychologist, started a ministry for gay Catholics in San Diego by recruiting and interviewing men gathered from advertisements taken out in \textit{Los Angeles Free Press}. 

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Eventually enough men assembled in order to begin having meetings and mass in San Diego and Los Angeles. Father Nidorf coined the name Dignity for the group because “the name Dignity just came to me as appropriate one of our basic goals was to bring dignity into the spiritual and social lives of very special people.” Whether Father Nidorf was conscious of it or not, recognizing the human dignity of every human being was a basic postconciliar concept and one that was probably deeply ingrained into his identity as a Catholic.

By the summer of 1970, a draft of Dignity’s constitution was drawn, chairman appointed, and in the fall Dignity held its first official meeting at a church in Los Angeles’ St. Brendan’s Parish. It did not take long for Archbishop Timothy Manning of Los Angeles to determine the principles of Dignity “untenable” and he forbade Nidorf to work with the group. Nidorf’s departure did not stop Dignity from publishing its national newsletter and expanding its programs into other cities. Groups like Dignity and a growing gay rights movement captured the attention of religious leaders, and in 1972 the National Federation of Priests’ Councils met and passed a resolution concerning ministries to homosexuals. “The Federation noted that ‘the Church’s concern for and ministry to the homosexual community is practically invisible, and therefore, nonexistent in the United States.’” The council organized a task force under the Justice and Peace Commission of the Salvatorian Fathers and released “A Model for ministry to the Homosexual Community” to be voted on in 1974.

If some discussion of homosexuality was occurring on task force panels and councils, more discussion was evident in the lay-oriented and lay-published journals, including Catholic World, U.S. Catholic, Commonweal, and National Catholic Reporter. Contributors called for a much-needed pastoral response attuned to the human dignity of gay and lesbian Catholics and even for the church to explore homosexual love as valid. The June 1971 cover of Catholic World featured the headline “Homosexuality in the Seventies” complete with a photo of a priest carrying a large sign that read “Gay people this is your church.” St. Ambrose philosophy professor Joseph A. McCaffrey introduced readers to “the cultural storm between heterosexual or ‘straight’ society and that part of the homosexual milieu known as the ‘gay world.’” McCaffrey summarized some basic moral, religious, psychological, and legal arguments while he also foreshadowed “what is being witnessed at the moment is introductory compared to what can be expected later in the seventies.”
Many of these early articles on homosexuality and Catholicism objected to state legislation regulating the private acts of citizens and the blatant lack of condemnation for homophobic attitudes and practices—especially by police interrogations and raids. While the authors held different views about the morality of same-sex genital activity, they all agreed that discrimination against homosexual persons was a violation of justice and human rights. The pastoral care initiative urging compassion and justice for the oppressed was a practice that church leaders would continue to sharpen. At the basic level leaders had to determine who could be considered “oppressed.” In 1973 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Pastoral Research and Practice released “Principles to Guide Confessors in Questions of Homosexuality.” While the bishops castigated homosexual acts as intrinsically evil, the committee also instructed confessors to avoid judgmental attitudes. The committee determined a person’s homosexual orientation could be an unchosen part of human nature that in particular circumstances could not be changed or treated by psychiatric care.64

In summary, the church’s teaching emphasized that a person’s homosexual orientation was not a sin, but a person’s homosexual action and sexual behavior could in no way be approved. If the church reified the distinction between the individual and the act, other laity, religious, and theologians obscured the lines between compassion for the individual, a defense of moral values, and the integrity of the traditional family. Many directly challenged traditional ethics of sex within a procreative, natural law framework.65 Union Theological Seminary professor Tom Driver asked the readers of Commonweal to reevaluate the meaning of marriage in an era of gay and women’s movements. “If this is done,” commented Driver, “we are freed to recognize that the forms of sexual love do not matter when compared to the dignity of persons and their capacity for trust.”66 In the same issue of Commonweal, Peter Fink asked why Catholics were willing to cry out for racial justice and protest for peace, but stayed home during gay pride week, thus committing injustice by not caring. “It is strange finally,” commented Fink, “when you consider that the consciousness of the Church today is openly directed towards justice for minority groups and the liberation of the oppressed.”67

As historian Joseph Chinnici, OFM and other Catholic historians have pointed out, the first period of conciliar reception (1967-1983) was particularly contentious as Catholics struggled over the meaning of pastoral when applied to politics and protest.68 Gene Burns asked in his book The Frontiers of Catholicism what many have wondered: how could church leaders,
especially the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, be left on some social and political issues such as war and peace and right on others, particularly those pertaining to sexuality.\textsuperscript{69} The pastoral dilemma was complex as church leaders and priests had to balance the substance of faith with the manner in which it is presented as well as collate public speech and private application. Fink like other revisionists called for the church to “lend a political as well as pastoral hand.” This case study of Gramick, Nugent, and New Ways Ministry demonstrates how the pastoral was negotiated within American politics as well as within church politics.\textsuperscript{70}

As a more public (and controversial) figure in the Catholic Church on sexuality issues, John McNeill, SJ did both. In September of the same year of Fink’s article, McNeill delivered the keynote address to the First National Dignity convention in Los Angeles. He acknowledged that all in attendance were “inheritors of the suffering, anguish, and even torture of literally millions of our homosexual brothers and sisters through the centuries.” He blamed the church for not seeing its “attitude toward the homosexual” as social injustice “equally based in a questionable interpretation of Scripture, prejudice and blind adherence to purely human traditions falsely interpreted as laws of nature and of God.” McNeill called Catholics into a period of conscious raising to identify the structures and ideas supporting injustice.\textsuperscript{71}

Theologian Gregory Baum was also raising awareness through his writings about Dignity’s revisionist challenges to traditional theology.\textsuperscript{72} In a 1974 issue of \textit{Commonweal}, Baum explained that Dignity was helping the self-affirmation of gay Catholics by believing “that Gays can express their sexuality in a manner that is consonant with Christ teachings.”\textsuperscript{73} Dignity’s tripartite responsibility to the church, society, and individual gay Catholics worked to develop a more inclusive sexual theology consistent with Christ’s teaching of love, promote acceptance through education and legal reform, and reaffirm individuals’ self-acceptance and dignity in the church and society.\textsuperscript{74} Despite Dignity’s persuasive force, theologians like Baum—who had the \textit{Humane Vitae} ruling relatively fresh in their minds—recognized that the Catholic Church was not likely to alter its traditional teaching. “It would be a mistake,” Baum wrote, “if Dignity made an appeal to the Catholic hierarchy for special recognition. A realistic strategy, in my view, would be to create a moderate and well-founded minority position in the Catholic Church.”\textsuperscript{75} Dignity did crate a subaltern space for gay and lesbian Catholics, but others wanted more recognition of same-sex love from church leaders and the wider church community.

\textbf{A Burgeoning Attention to Issues of Same Sex Love and the Catholic Church}
It seemed that a positive number of ecclesiastical leaders and pastors in the United States were inching closer to a more complex understanding of same-sex love and human sexuality, but Rome, at best, confirmed its arbitrary position on the matter. In 1975 the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) published *Persona Humana* or *The Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*. The document affirmed that violations of the moral order of sexuality were wrong and serious, but furthered the Vatican’s pastoral position on homosexual orientation. The Vatican asserted homosexual feelings were not inherently evil, because one's sexual orientation was not a matter of choice but something a person was born with. Pastors were to treat homosexuals “with understanding and sustained in the hope of overcoming their personal difficulties and their inability to fit in to society.” However, homosexual acts were judged as “intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of” whether it be in a casual or committed relationship. Stated quite simply, the pastoral response to homosexuality was to love the sinner but hate the sin.

Bishop Francis Mugavero of Brooklyn, New York, issued a pastoral letter on sexuality that was one of the first to express this message to gays and lesbians, while judging “other orientations rather mildly.” He recognized that gays and lesbians were called to a celibate life, but that the church should give homosexuals greater “pastoral understanding and care” because they cannot look forward to an intimate relationship with another person. With pastoral sensitivity Mugavero addressed gays and lesbians by pledging his “willingness...to try to find new ways to communicate the truth of Christ because we believe it will make you free.”

Shortly after Mugavero’s letter in 1976 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (in the US) stated in a pastoral letter on moral values and civil rights that "homosexuals...should not suffer prejudice against their basic human rights. They have the right to respect, friendship and justice." The letter encouraged homosexuals “to have an ‘active role’ in the in the Christian Community, and urged the Christian community to provide homosexual people with a ‘special degree of pastoral understanding and care.’”

While the church was willing to separate orientation from behavior, other Catholics were forming more radical ideas. In January 1976 John McNeill had received the *Imprimi Potest* from Rome and published *The Church and the Homosexual* receiving both affirmative and invalidating attention from the press. More revisionist issues were gaining attention, such as the ideas expressed by the well-known Catholic writer Richard Ginder and his critique of
Catholic teachings on sexuality. In October 1976 Dignity/ New York, Inc. began publishing *Insight: A Quarterly of gay Catholic Opinion* to serve “as a forum of discussion between the gay and non-gay community, to make the gay experience understandable.” The magazine included articles on coming out, rights of gay people in the church, women’s issues, and educating the non-gay community, while espousing revisionist ideas. The next year a “ground-breaking” report was issued from the Committee on the Study of Human Sexuality of the Catholic Theological Society of America calling for “support of committed homosexual relationships,” but met widespread animosity. Philip Keane also released *Sexual Morality: A Catholic Perspective*. Although Keane’s ethics fit within the mediating position due to his normative stance regarding heterosexual relationships, he did acknowledge that committed homosexual relationships could serve as criteria for genital expression of “creative growth towards integration” under principles of proportionalism.

While theologians commenced considering the issue of homosexuality and the Catholic Church, Dignity was a ministry firmly established, offering counseling, mass, and a sense of community, while serving as an advocate for gay and lesbian Catholics. Sister Jeannine Gramick, SSND and Father Robert Nugent, SDS wanted to fill in the discursive and social activism space between gay and lesbian Catholics, the wider Catholic community, and church authorities. The pair incorporated New Ways Ministry (NWM) in 1977 to help answer the question, “What is the Catholic Church doing for my gay brothers and sisters?” and considered their work a “much-needed” ministry to homosexuals and lesbians in the Roman Catholic Church. Through the auspices of NWM, Gramick and Nugent published numerous articles, books, and guides on homosexuality and the church. Their work catalogues the story of gay and Catholic ministries, their role in educating the catholic community on diverse opinions on same-sex love, the fight for social justice, civil rights, and gay rights, and multifarious reactions to church teachings. They hoped that by presenting numerous positive statements on homosexuality, the Catholic community’s conscience would be raised and even reformed to accept their fellow gay and lesbian Catholics.

Justice and reconciliation were at the core of NWM’s model for reform. The co-directors understood that the church’s teaching on sexuality would be slow to change, but they were willing to make an effort and provide encouragement for rectification. Gramick and Nugent told their stories and that of New Ways very well, because their narratives recounted the struggles
and oppression endured by gay and lesbian Catholics as their own. Primarily, their publications provided progressive developments in church teachings and theology, documented the emerging social-scientific context regarding homosexuality, and recapitulated the writings or pronouncements of American Catholics who had spoken out on behalf of gay rights. They have related the history of their ministry for gay and lesbian Catholics so well that no scholar has ventured to situate Gramick, Nugent, and NWM into a larger history of gay and lesbian religious movements and American Catholic history—Gramick and Nugent have practically done it for us. Between Gramick and Nugent’s own publications and Bondings, the newsletter of NWM, the story of gay and lesbian Catholic ministries and the non-gay community’s reaction to their work unfolded in their own words and those of the Catholic and secular press. A laudable story emerged saturated with hope for reform. Indeed this broader investigation seeks to understand their optimism but also their delicate dance with church authorities about what it meant to serve the church as a body of people in the confusing postconciliar age.

To do this, my inquiry begins with the themes emphasized by Gramick and Nugent themselves. Through their publications, workshops, speaking engagements, and press releases, Gramick and Nugent developed strategic talking points and ways to effectively communicate their intended discourse in an unsettled, diverse, and political Catholic culture. The pair consciously worked to set the tone for a discussion of homosexuality and the church, or more broadly, they had stake in developing and situating progressive Catholic voices in the burgeoning postconciliar narrative. Their articulated topics—including appropriate pastoral care, social justice, civil rights, reconciliation, and inviolability of conscience—appear to be worthy attributes and benign goals, but in fact, these were contested themes in post-Vatican II Catholic culture that illuminate cultural, theological, and political differences. Gramick and Nugent’s calculated and intended narrative gives researchers a place to start, but also provides an interpretation for historians to critique and expand upon. To situate Catholic gay and lesbian reconciling ministries within larger historical developments of religion, culture, and politics in postconciliar Catholic life and American society at large, I develop an analytical narrative that is more open-ended. I reveal points of contestation and rupture where the reconciling, optimistic narrative bumps up against the realities of practice.

When not writing, Gramick and Nugent led retreats for gay and non-gay Catholics, held educational workshops, counseled gay and lesbian Catholics and their families, and conducted
social science research. Their goal was to assimilate gay and lesbians into the church, or at best, introduce the idea. Chapter One provides the context for these activities based on Gramick and Nugent’s interpretation of pastoral care in a postconciliar era and their burgeoning identities as a religious and cleric shaped by their interpretation of the church in a post-Vatican II period. As such, this chapter dissects an early history NWM as well as Gramick and Nugent’s individual and collective experiences with counseling, human rights issues, networking with like-minded Catholics, and entrees into church politics.

Chapter Two investigates how Gramick and Nugent extended pastoral care beyond education to public protest. Like other liberal gay rights initiatives, they organized resistance to anti-gay campaigns, including Anita Bryant’s anti-discrimination agenda, Proposition 6 in California, and anti-discrimination ordinances in cities across the country. Part of their success in mobilizing sympathetic Catholics to gay rights initiatives, however, was due to their strategy that down played the morality of sexual acts. Pastoral dilemmas quickly arose. The minister’s desire to appreciate persons’ emotional, spiritual, physical, and sexual needs collided with the duty to uphold doctrinal teaching more acutely in gay rights debates. Attention to the issue of homosexuality and the church amassed in the late 1970s and cumulated in 1978 when the National Conference of Catholic Bishops released *Principles to Guide Confessors in Questions of Homosexuality* that characterized homosexuals as persons with special needs.87 According to *Principles*, gay and lesbian Catholics had a special need for an end to discrimination. The same year the National Federation of Priest’s Councils issued a resolution on the rights of homosexuals, which they deemed were “often obscured by those who disregard the crucial distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual activity.” These priests vowed to support civil rights measures and education on gay rights.88

Public encouragement by pastoral priests was not taken so lightly by Rome. Around the same time, the Vatican’s CDF ordered the removal of the *imprimi potest* from John McNeill’s book because he had appeared on television and granted public interviews (including an appearance on the Donahue Show). Some church leaders were livid at proposition of homosexuality and the church going public, bypassing the silence in most seminaries and parishes. Many disturbed leaders blamed McNeill for the public’s curiosity and interest. Indeed, these church leaders wanted to restrict the conversation to elite theological circles—the exact opposite goal of educational groups like NWM. As a result of McNeill’s outspokenness, he was
forbidden by the CDF to “discuss the issue of homosexuality and morality in the public arena.” The CDF justified the censoring by reasoning that Catholics could mistake McNeill’s revisionist views as those endorsed by the church.⁸⁹

Despite Rome’s apprehensions regarding McNeill, priests and bishops in the United States were not the only group tackling the issue from a human rights and justice perspective. The bishops of the Netherlands released *Homosexual People in Society* in 1979, a discussion designed for lay people concerning biblical references (or lack thereof) on homosexuality and issues of unjust discrimination and gay human rights.⁹⁰ In the same year the bishops of England and Wales made available *An Introduction to the Pastoral Care of Homosexual People*.⁹¹ Gramick and Nugent consulted English and Welsh bishops, helping them develop a pastoral response that dealt with controversial issues, such as the moral difference between recreational, promiscuous sex and the more upstanding potential for exclusive relationships between two homosexuals in a loving, committed relationship.⁹²

While some committees of church authorities in the U.S. and Western Europe were willing to tackle moral distinctions, most were not. Instead, the call to action was framed in the language of justice, pastoral care, and human rights where most of the focus implied fighting discrimination targeting sexual orientation, not behavior.⁹³ Dignity did not uphold the distinction between homosexual orientation and behavior—such a separation of identities was considered violent and impossible—while other groups, mostly of the mediating position, were not willing to venture to the realm of overtly discussing homosexual love.⁹⁴ Mediators, however, were willing to celebrate the church’s attention to the issue and accept progress one step at a time. These thinkers and activists continued to frame gay rights as a civil and human rights issue. In summer 1979, the United States Catholic Conference Department of Education Young Adult Ministry Board issued a pastoral statement for all suffering people that stated:

> It is the dream of the Gospel which calls all people to affirm themselves and to take control of their own destiny, while at the same time, affirming all others and empowering them to be their own determiners. As Hispanic who has been raped of a heritage; as Black who has been condemned to second-class status; as Vietnam veteran whose nights are filled with the horrors of a war that everyone else has happily forgotten; as homosexual who is forced to live in the shadows...we are suffering people…” who “ache for a sense of community.”⁹⁵
Several individual bishops and dioceses supported the work of NWM and developed similar educational resources for their dioceses—all systematized within the language of justice and human rights. For instance, St. Paul and Minneapolis Archbishop John R. Roach’s January 1978 “Statement Supporting Human Rights” upheld “the inviolable dignity of the human person” warning that “social isolation, ridicule, and economic deprivation of homosexual behavior is not compatible with basic social justice.” Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen of Seattle led the opposition to Seattle’s Initiative 13 (an anti-gay ballot measure), arguing that it would further discrimination against homosexuals. When Archbishop John R. Quinn came to San Francisco in 1977, perhaps he was not prepared to encounter the activist mythos of the Bay City, but out of necessity he was much a part of the debate on homosexuality and the church. In May 1980 he released “Pastoral Letter on Homosexuality,” which did not endorse homosexual activity, but reassured readers that homosexual orientation was not condemned. A year later Quinn commissioned the San Francisco Archdiocesan Commission on Social Justice to establish a Task Force on Gay/Lesbian Issues to research civil rights and homophobic brutality.

While the San Francisco archdiocesan task force gathered data and drafted its findings, Gramick and Nugent sharpened their political savvies and learned the importance of having religious superiors in the institutional church structure that supported them as well as how to negotiate public and private discourse with church leaders. Chapter Three investigates issues of opacity and transparency in the institutional church and how Gramick and Nugent’s careful maneuvering between these poles worked for their advantage. For example, in the early 1980s NWM helped sponsor a secret retreat for lesbian religious, but they also coordinated the very public First National Symposium on Homosexuality and the Catholic Church held in Washington, D.C. Additionally, Gramick and Nugent edited *Homosexuality and the Catholic Church*, an anthology that summarized many of the presentations at the 1981 National Symposium, featuring essays by theologians, and Catholic gay and lesbian activists. In 1983 Nugent released a similar edited work entitled *A Challenge to Love*, which catalogued contemporary social, biblical-theological, pastoral, and vocational perspectives on homosexuality. The book did have a favorable reception amongst the progressive Catholic community, but the Vatican attempted to prevent *A Challenge to Love* from being reprinted. The CDF dissuaded endorsements fearing the topics in the anthology would confuse laity, which from the curia’s perspective should be kept to private theological debate.
In July 1982 when the San Francisco commission released the report *Homosexuality and Social Justice*, the results of the study were not what Archbishop Quinn wanted to hear. The commission did address violence against gays and lesbians, but in a more drastic turn, it blamed the church for condemning homosexuality, legitimating violence, and causing oppression. In short, *Homosexuality and Social Justice* summoned the church to develop a new sexual ethic.103

By the early 1980s, members of the task force and many gay and lesbian Catholics became frustrated with the church’s insistence on separating sexual orientation from sexual acts and relationships. Building on the previous two chapters, Chapter Four analyzes how gay and lesbian Catholics and NWM responded to and interpreted this central two-fold sexual ethic in their lives and religious practice, which was rarely without emotional pain and suffering. Could gay and lesbian Catholics ever be reconciled to the church?

**Increasing Resistance**

Between 1982 and part of 1986 progressive dioceses released pastoral plans for ministries with homosexual people, conducted surveys on gay and lesbian Catholics in their jurisdictions, and established gay and lesbian outreach programs. Such awareness was not without backlash and Chapter Five traces the decline of the “golden age” of gay Catholic reform. In the midst of increasing resistance, Nugent andGramick situated themselves as prophetic figures still “building bridges” despite insurmountable odds. For instance, a particular anti-gay publication found an immediate audience in some Catholic circles. Catholic priest Enrique Reuda, then of Rochester, New York, released *The Homosexual Network: Private Lives and Public Policy* in 1982. Reuda claimed that he documented infiltrating homosexual ideologies into the Catholic Church, including key leaders, networks, and funds.104 His work is still used today by both Protestants and Catholics foreshadowing the “evils” wrought by homosexuality, including sexual abuse. The child abuse scandals, which broke in 2000, have become the religious right’s favorite anti-Catholic propaganda tool linking the priesthood, homosexuality, and pedophilia to a corrupt church. The tragedy has also become fodder for all sorts of Catholics demanding more accountable church leaders. It is difficult to measure the damage of Reuda’s work and his influence on the general Catholic community. Revisionists and mediators dismissed his book as a piece of hate literature and simply inaccurate. If anything, Reuda’s book—however dubious—contributed to discourse on homosexuality and the church.
In the mid-1980s John McNeill could no longer keep hushed. McNeill, who had been gagged for almost a decade, broke his silence in 1986 to become influential in Dignity and the broader secular gay and lesbian movement from his residence in New York. Because of McNeill’s defiance, or perhaps due the mounting outspokenness on the issue, the CDF took more extreme measures directed at the issue of homosexuality and the Catholic Church in America. In October 1986 the CDF released *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, popularly known as the “Ratzinger Letter” (in reference to its signed author Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger). Overall, the letter was a discouraging step backwards and an insult to gay and lesbian persons when it suggested homosexuality “is more or less a strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil.” Although the 1986 pronouncement seemed like an insurmountable regression in their work, Catholic gay and lesbian ministries like NWM continued their efforts to “build bridges.” Jeannine Gramick and Pat Furey edited a series of essays reacting to the “Ratzinger Letter” in *The Vatican and Homosexuality*. The contributors ranged from those such as Archbishop Quinn who attempted to soften its effects, to those who accused the Vatican for failing to recognize pastoral and personal experience, to those who considered it a blatant homophobic document.

One could argue that although discouraged after the Vatican’s 1986 letter, gay and lesbian Catholics and their supporters successfully regrouped and continued to publish articles and collections detailing the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics as well as framing the discussion as a justice issue. However, the climate of gay and lesbian activism had drastically changed by the mid-1980s with the onslaught of the AIDS epidemic. Dignity, along with other gay and lesbian religious organizations, focused their attention needs of their lovers and friends. The church’s role in relieving the suffering from AIDS was not without controversy as many gays and lesbians experienced the church’s potential for compassion from their deathbeds—not while they were living.

By the early 1990s and in the midst of the AIDS crisis, the issue of homosexuality and the church reappeared with a greater emphasis to consider the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics. In 1990 the bishops of the United States released *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*, but disagreed on the definition of “disorder” in the document; nonetheless, they upheld the distinction between homosexual orientation and behavior as important. Once again, the Vatican responded with a rebuttal and in 1992 the CDF
Some Considerations Concerning the Catholic Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons, which implied discrimination was not unjust for certain employment situations. For the next decade church authorities and most pastors would uphold the requirement of homosexuals to live a chaste life, but believe that they should not be discriminated against either. The tension resulting from the separation of a sexual identity from behavior would become the subject of most books on the issue well into the 21st century. The distinction between homosexual orientation and behavior has existed in church writings from the mid-1970s, and revisionists have not made expected progress, especially with officials in Rome. Nevertheless, for gay and lesbian Catholic ministries like NWM, the dialogue continues, or at least they hope.

In summary, scholars of religious history have neglected Roman Catholic gay and lesbian religious movements. The source material, bibliographies, and histories come from the organizers and participants themselves, while the majority of secondary material sits firmly within the realm of ethics. Little secondary historical material has been catalogued, organized, and analyzed in a larger scope of American Catholic postconciliar history, or American religious history for that matter. The task is daunting as one amalgamates the writings of diverse disciplines ranging from ethics, theology, social and cultural history, and ethnography to capture the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics and their supporters. I suggest that the picture could best be framed in a discussion of postconciliar Catholicism—not a simple task, but one involving a complex series of ideologies, events, and irresolution that scholars have yet to put their finger on, and are in fact, still working through.

The lives of Gramick and Nugent and the materialization of New Ways Ministry exemplifies a unique period in American Catholic history in which religious were experimenting with what it meant to serve the “people of God.” Not only was the nature of religious and clerical life changing, but also what it meant to be “gay” and “lesbian” in America. Although Gramick and Nugent were introduced to the gay liberation movement late in its development, the themes of fighting oppression, mobilizing grass roots efforts, and developing tolerance resonated with their religious training and concentration on social justice. Gramick and Nugent’s work in the early 1970s was indeed a radical interpretation of ministry for the Catholic Church, but at the same time, their story illuminates a broader era of experimentation in American Catholic religious life and culture. More to the point, they did not consider their work with laity or
religious “radical,” but rather an extension of faith and justice work already occurring in their religious communities. American religious historians have overlooked how this reform movement complicated understandings of Catholic sexual ethics. This study also exposes the contested intersections of religious and sexual identities already taking place in the church by the mid-1970s and how Gramick and Nugent initiated and facilitated the merger. If today people assume “gay” and “Catholic” are contradictory identities, the estrangement was even more so in the mid-1970s. Gramick and Nugent built bridges between the two when many Catholic leaders assumed “gay and lesbian” and “Catholic ministry” were incongruous.
CHAPTER ONE: THE NEW WAYS MINISTRY

“What is the Catholic Church doing for my gay brothers and sisters?”

A Sister and Priest with a New Type of Ministry

The 1971 Philadelphia Evening Bulletin headline exclaimed, “Nun meets with Gays in the Convent,” complete with a large picture of Sister Jeannine Gramick, a School Sister of Notre Dame. The sensational headline was misleading, but the young sister did organize home mass for Philadelphian gay and lesbian Catholics and admittedly, on occasion, did invite her gay friends to the convent. Born to a Polish Philadelphia family in 1942, Gramick remembers her family as not especially pious, or in her words, “Catholic in name only…when you hatched, matched, and dispatched.” She attributes her interest in religious life at an early age to Catholic grade school nuns who bathed their young pupil in kindness and love. At age 7 she felt a calling to be a nun, because nuns were girls who “really loved God.” She did not give much attention to which religious order she would be best suited. Rather she resolved to enter a different religious order every year depending on the religious community of her given teacher in the enormous 2,500 pupil Catholic girl’s high school staffed by six or seven religious orders. After graduation she entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame, took final vows in 1967, and taught for a few years before she studied for her masters at Notre Dame University and her doctoral degree at University of Pennsylvania.

Consumed with the realities of living out renewal in religious life in the 1960s, Gramick admits she was not fully aware of the secular 1960s social scene, counterculture, or the sexual revolution. It was an exciting time of questioning and experimentation within religious communities as well as in the world beyond the convent walls. Gramick noted that her own experience of renewal, and thus the shedding of the “good sister” stereotype, happened at age 26 when she received a distressing phone call informing her that her mother had a brain tumor. The worried daughter agonizingly waited for her superior’s directive, which determined if she could leave to visit her ill mother or only be released from her duties for the anticipated funeral. For Gramick such directives seemed childish and hopelessly trapped in outdated interpretations of suffering. Resting in her own mature, personal decision, Gramick decided to return to Philadelphia to be with her dying mother. Moving closer to home as well as pursuing four years
of graduate study without a superior nearby provided a time in which she became more self-determined.

Although Gramick took classes in liberation theologies and sociology, her awareness of social justice issues did not come about until the 1970s, and it was not because of exposure to racial issues, peace and justice movements, or the environment—she stumbled into the gay liberation movement. While working on her Ph.D. in mathematics education at the University of Pennsylvania, Gramick rented a room from an Episcopal priest and his wife in exchange for providing child care for their two young children. The priest’s student group on campus had an outreach program to the Philadelphia chapter of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). The GLF sponsored clergy days to educate religious workers about gay and lesbian issues, and they used St. Mary’s Church hall for meetings as well as organizing dances once a month on the premises.

While some religious and clergy thought such dances were like having cocktail parties for a group of alcoholics, Gramick was curious. She volunteered to sell soft drinks behind the counter at one of the dances, but the sister’s desire to remain inconspicuous was thwarted by her donning a small veil. Several dance attendees, including a young man named Dominic Bash, noticed the presence of the nun.

Gramick befriended Bash, a young gay man of slight-build and a full head of hair who told Gramick his story of growing up Catholic and feeling rejected by the church. He painfully recounted tales of torment from adolescents and adults, fear in the confessional, as well as priestly warnings of damnation when admitting to sexual guilt. Gramick quickly learned that the church’s rejection of Bash and his distressing pastoral experiences were not unique. She met many friends who went through the same thing—dismantling her stereotypical view that homosexuals were mentally ill, sick, sad, and at the very least, emotionally ill. Gramick could not deny that Bash and his friends were self-assured, stable, and perhaps more psychologically healthy than heterosexual acquaintances, even despite such discrimination and hurt. Bash had been attending the Episcopalian church on campus that was more welcoming, but he missed mass and asked Gramick if she could organize a service in his apartment for gay Catholics.

At first Gramick experienced some trepidation about volunteering, but she was haunted by Bash’s question: “What is the Church doing for my gay brothers and sisters?” Gramick had no idea, but she deduced that a ministry to homosexuals was “a much needed one” because she “promptly discovered the church was doing nothing about it.” The sister recognized an
immediate pastoral need for the opportunity to celebrate mass, but she was uncertain what could come next. Her fears were soon relieved when service participants arrived to the mass and “looked like normal people” who also were grateful for the opportunity to express their faith.¹¹ Learning many attendees felt that the institutional church had rejected them, Gramick was shocked and saddened that many of her new friends had not stepped foot into a church in five, ten, or even twenty years. The pastoral need was palpable, and she began to recruit priests to officiate weekly home masses.

The growing group attracted publicity in conservative Philadelphia, and Gramick received a couple of dozen letters from readers, but surprisingly, the letters supported her work two to one. One of the encouraging notes arrived from a young Philadelphian diocesan priest named Robert Nugent who offered his help. He wrote Gramick explaining that he had no idea about gay and lesbian Catholics or the details of her work, but was glad the sister was reaching out to people. “That’s the direction we should be going after Vatican II,” commented Nugent, “People: black people, divorced people, gay people, whatever. I believe in doing that.”¹² Gramick wasted no time calling Nugent to invite him to celebrate mass with the group. Nugent affectionately remembers the beginnings of his friendship and partnership with Gramick as the “Adam and Eve story,” and like Gramick, Nugent was not exactly sure what he had volunteered to do. “I remember the first time I went [to Gramick’s home mass],” muses Nugent. “I was very nervous and scared, and I thought, well, you opened your mouth so you are going to have to follow through with it.¹³ But when he met the group, Nugent was very impressed; many of them even had experience in religious life. It was not long before the priest immersed himself in the gay, Catholic community, absorbing but also disturbed by the personal accounts of tormented gay Catholics suffering from guilt and rejection by the church. At the time Nugent’s own religious life was in transition as he realized his intellectual interests and academic pursuits felt stifled in parish work. He felt “called to move out of the traditional church” due to frustration that he “was saving the saved.”¹⁴ Nugent justified his non-parochial career move by explaining that “Jesus went to the bars and the restaurants to help and that’s the kind of calling I have.”¹⁵

While at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Overbrook, Pennsylvania, from 1955-1965, Nugent quietly attended liturgical conferences to which he attributes his development and exposure to church life outside of the Philadelphian model of Irish-Catholic power and conformity.¹⁶ Nugent regularly traveled beyond the boarders of the city of brotherly love to visit
Trappist monasteries and dioceses on the east coast, and he accredits his larger vision of the church to not only to his travels and participating in liturgical reform but also to his voracious appetite for reading (working in the library aided such pursuits). Nugent began his career as a diocesan priest in Philadelphia parishes, but like many priests who experienced dissatisfaction with parochial ministry in the 1960s, his first parish experiences were disappointing and depressing. The first priest for whom he worked had an alcohol problem and the second was chauvinistic and controlling. And like other postconciliar priests filled the idealistic visions for social reform combating racial and economic oppression, Nugent was not prepared for the more complex pragmatic issues that developed while severing a short stint as a white parish priest for an inner-city black parish. He thought he had found his niche beyond regular parish duties when working with the poor and sought out support from progressive priests in the area. On the heels of the Second Vatican Council, dozens of progressive Philadelphian priests regularly began to meet to talk about their assignments, pay, or personnel and living situations in the midst of a transitioning priesthood responding to reforms in religious life. The traditional Philadelphia archdiocese disapproved of the loose priestly federation. “So I think from the very beginning,” Nugent observes, “I was probably pegged as not so much a trouble maker but as someone who was thinking outside the lines, or outside the box, so to speak.”

Besides routine parish work at over five different parishes, Nugent dabbled in ecumenical dialogue, provided adult education classes on Vatican II, and experimented with adult liturgy, but his intellectual and spiritual interests remained beyond the bounds of the parish. Nugent’s vocational desires became more self-evident when he discovered that he did not have any real power to implicate the changes he envisioned for parish life. In an attempted career change, Nugent served a short stint as a high school teacher but failed to connect with students. It was when the Philadelphia archdiocese would not grant Nugent leave from parish work that he slipped into a severe depression and was hospitalized for several months. Forbidden to take a leave of absence or sick leave, Nugent took a personal leave from diocesan assignments. He sought refuge with the De LaSalle Christian Brothers in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania (and later in Washington, D.C.), serving as a chaplain at their high school and officiating their mass. He also attended Temple University studying journalism for a year before he accepted a graduate scholarship at Villanova University for library science.
Although not officially sanctioned to function as a priest while on personal leave, he subverted the rules when Dominican sisters nearby asked if Nugent would officiate mass for them. Even after explaining his tenuous situation with the diocese, the sisters invited him to participate. “So I did it quietly,” remembers Nugent. “I was still functioning low key.” Neither the brothers nor sisters were bothered by Nugent’s renegade status nor that he lacked official faculties. Occasionally, however, the archdiocese would interfere and write a letter to the Christian Brothers reminding them that Nugent was not supposed to officiate mass. The brothers would respectfully, yet subversively respond, “Yes. Thank you,” and the visiting priest would continue officiating quietly with plentiful support. Nugent’s three years with the brothers was a fulfilling time as he experienced community with like-minded Catholics by working as a chaplain and with their skid row ministries at St. John’s Hospice. He postures, “I just really felt good to be with people who thought like me, and accepted me because I was somewhat probably like an outcast or personae non grata in the diocese at the time because I had gone off on my own.”

It was during his time with the brothers that Nugent read about Gramick’s home mass and offered to help. Nugent often officiated mass for the ecumenical group of gay Catholics and Episcopalians, but after a year, the participants decided that they needed to deal with distinct Episcopal and Catholic theological and institutional issues separately. Nugent along with an Augustinian and Carmelite priest worked to transition the group of mostly male weekly mass attendees to an official Dignity chapter. As the Philadelphia Dignity chapter grew, Nugent did most of the counseling. If someone called the office, Nugent was the first priest to provide a sympathetic ear, but he learned quite a bit on the job. He reflected:

At the time, my only goal was to kind-of reconnect people with the church first of all, not to deal with any of the particular issues—moral or liberal issues—but just to say, you know you are welcome. We want you; the church is concerned about you. Basically, I was the church for them...It was important that they saw, not disapproval for what they were doing, but that they were cared for....The little thing that I could do for somebody that was going through a terrible guilt was to meet them in the middle and say, look, it is not that bad. I had not done a lot of research; I didn’t have all the answers; I was working on instinct--then I was drawn into the issues.

After immersing themselves in gay and lesbian people’s personal experiences with the church and pastoral care issues, Gramick and Nugent turned to the institutional church and civil rights. Nugent traveled to Boston to spend three weeks at the Dignity national headquarters and it
was not long until he collaborated with Tom Oddo, C.S.C., Dignity’s national secretary, as well as Gramick to write *Catholic Homosexuals: A Primer for Discussion*. The simple question answer format of the popular tiny booklet (or what Gramick and Nugent affectionately call the “gay catechism”) first addressed church teachings on homosexuality, then tackled scriptural evidence for various moral positions, and recognized individual Catholics and groups supporting gay rights.

Gramick left Philadelphia in 1972 to teach at the College of Notre Dame in Baltimore, while Nugent stayed on and developed the Philadelphia Dignity chapter. Gramick’s instructional duties provided financial support for her philanthropic endeavors. Shortly after returning to Baltimore, Gramick helped get the Washington, D.C. Dignity chapter organized and then nearly a year later launched Dignity/Baltimore in the St. Jerome’s Convent chapel with Fr. Joseph Hughes and a group of eight men and two women. It was through Gramick’s effort that many priests in the Baltimore vicinity celebrated liturgies with Dignity’s gay and lesbian Catholics. She invited Baltimore residents to Dignity’s mass by visiting local gay bars and passing out flyers. On one occasion, Gramick’s provincial, Sister Francis Regis Carton, got a call from Lawrence Cardinal Sheehan who reported that an anonymous woman complained Sr. Gramick had been in a gay bar. Gramick explained to her provincial that of course she was in a gay bar. “How else would I reach this population?” she mused. The explanation was significant for the provincial. Over the years, Gramick and Nugent navigated institutional waters because dozens of superiors and allies in the structure who were sympathetic and protective. Gramick garnered the support of most of her provincial leaders who would buffer the criticisms from magisterial authorities or even the larger public, as similarly true with Nugent’s superiors who supported not only Nugent’s work but also their own Salvatorian gay and lesbian ministry.

During leave from the Philadelphia archdiocese Nugent eventually found the right fit and support with the Salvatorians, or Society of the Divine Savior, a religious community with North American headquarters in Milwaukee. He was attracted to their commitment to social justice and renewal, but his desire to transfer only bolstered his tenuous relationship with the Philadelphia archdiocese. A Philadelphia gay rights ordinance had been proposed several times in the early 1970s, but routinely defeated—much to the satisfaction of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia who served as a major opponent. Representing Dignity Philadelphia, Nugent hesitantly agreed to testify for the 1975 gay rights ordinance before the city council while
Cardinal Krol sent the priest-director of the Archdiocesan Family Life Bureau to oppose the bill. Nugent took a deep breath and reminded himself that the Vatican II document *The Church in the Modern World* addressed the fundamental rights of human persons and ending discrimination based on skin color, sex, and social class. Unfortunately the influential document said nothing about discrimination based on sexual orientation, but Nugent extended the parameters to include sexuality. Nugent rationalized, “I think that we can consider that homosexual people fall within those parameters.” His testimony was a gutsy move to say the least, especially since the archdiocese sent a priest to testify against the ordinance.

As providence would have it, Nugent’s testimony, which highlighted the need for compassion and an end to discrimination, followed a young man who spoke to a life of facing oppression and discrimination for being gay. Nonetheless, the council’s first question for Nugent asked, “Father, what is your official assignment?” Nugent, assuming that the archdiocese had a part in the question, answered, “I have no official assignment. I am on a personal leave of absence. I only speak for myself, and I don’t speak for the church.” Nugent’s well-received testimony captured media attention as the local newspaper ran editorials in his favor. Needless to say, his relationship with the archdiocese was strained and nearing termination. Shortly after the council meeting the archdiocese sent a letter to every Philadelphian priest, sister, and church warning them about Nugent and his disobedience. Failing to mention the cause of Nugent’s offence (the absence heightening intrigue), the letter explained Nugent was not to be recognized as a priest with faculties, and if so, he would be subject to ecclesiastical penalties. To abide his colleagues’ fears and questionings about the unnamed offence, Nugent sent a letter explaining his position and involvement city council meeting to former seminarian classmates, asking them to circulate his explanation. While friends and colleagues may have sympathized with Nugent, Philadelphia ecclesiastical authority did not. If Nugent wanted to continue functioning as a priest, he would have to find another way.

In 1975 Nugent left Philadelphia for Washington, D.C. to live with the Salvatorian community although the archdiocese ignored his request to join the Salvatorians. During his first year with the Salvatorians, on occasion Nugent returned to the Philadelphia Dignity group. The archdiocese was tipped off about Nugent’s continued involvement with Dignity/Philadelphia and wrote the Salvatorians asking them to deny Nugent’s participation. Salvatorian leaders ignored the letter, and proceeded to write the Philadelphia archdiocese during Nugent’s second year
requesting permission for Nugent to enter their novitiate. The response letter from Philadelphia outlined Nugent’s supposed trouble with obedience and authority, but if the Salvatorians thought he would make a good religious, then permission was granted to transfer Nugent (perhaps at the relief of the archdiocese, but most definitely to Nugent’s delight). 

In the Baltimore area, Gramick and Nugent worked at the Quixote Center, a Catholic peace and justice center in Washington, D.C. While living in the epicenter of public policy and volunteering at the Quixote Center with the support of their religious communities, they concentrated on gay issues and began developing educational workshops to help people overcome homophobia. Meanwhile the Salvatorians began their own ministry a few years after the Justice and Peace Commission of the Salvatorian Fathers released “A Model for Ministry to the Homosexual Community.” Ramon Wagner, SDS wrote Nugent in the summer 1976 expressing their common goal: “We are presently laying plans to begin the national Center for Gay Ministry.” He continued, “Good luck on the beginning of your novitiate year. I look forward to have you become an increasingly active member of the Society and our community.” Catholic advocates broadening justice issues to include sexuality and sexual identities did have precedent within Catholic theological circles and religious communities. In addition to the founding of Dignity in 1968, Gramick and Nugent were largely responsible for setting the terms of inclusive discussion concerning gay and lesbian issues in the U.S. Catholic Church.

Gramick and Nugent began working with Philadelphia gay and lesbian Catholics in 1971, the same year of the World Synod of Bishops released Gaudium et Spes. The document summoned church action “to be directed above all at those men and nations which because of various forms of oppression and because of the present character of our society are silent, indeed voiceless, victims of injustice.” Grounded in incarnational theology, the bishop’s pronouncement reinforced the church’s social justice message to make Christ present in the world through all types of human relations. In other words, the church had a responsibility to fight injustice on multiple levels ranging from the threat of nuclear war to racial prejudices to economic oppression. The bishops gave confidence to individuals to “lessen injustice, to lead lives of nonviolence, and to share in love and justice the goods of the earth.” They determined, “Such acts of love of neighbor make God present to the world and offer the hope of renewal.”
While sexuality was not explicitly mentioned, Gramick and Nugent found themselves interpreting this decree daily.

The Vatican responded to the growing questions over homosexuality, injustice, and the church by considering appropriate pastoral responses to homosexual congregants. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published *Persona Humana* or the *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics* in December 1975. Pastors were told “homosexuals must certainly be treated with understanding...But no pastoral method can be complied which would give moral justification to these acts on the grounds that they would be consonant with the condition of such people.” No doubt that heterosexuality was deemed the normative sexual orientation; nevertheless, the CDF did affirm that homosexual feelings were not inherently evil. Some Catholics borrowed from social-scientific literature and the growing attention to sexual identities in the second half of the 20th century to determine that a person’s sexual orientation was not a matter of choice, but something a person was born with. Pastors were admonished to treat homosexuals “with understanding and sustained in the hope of overcoming their personal difficulties and their inability to fit in to society.” Sexual orientation was not a sin in itself, yet homosexual acts were judged as “intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of” whether it be in a casual or committed relationship.  

Official church teachings separated sexual orientation from sexual behavior confirming a life of celibacy and suffering for gays and lesbians. Progressive theologians did acknowledge that the Vatican addressed the long-ignored issue—at least by upholding pastoral sensitivity and not blatant condemnation. For instance, Pope John Paul II reaffirmed the church’s position on homosexuality when he spoke to the council of bishops on a visit to Chicago in October 1979. Nugent told a reporter he was disappointed but not surprised. “At least the Pope made the distinction between orientation and activity...Most of the time, people condemn homosexuals for merely existing.” Others interpreted the pastoral declaration a step further. Bishop Francis Mugavero of Brooklyn, New York issued the pastoral letter “Sexuality – God’s Gift” a year following *Persona Humana*. Mugavero upheld the Vatican’s teaching but recognized that, “Our community must explore ways to secure the legitimate rights of all our citizens, regardless of sexual orientation.” He spoke directly to gays and lesbians, something church leaders had yet to do. “To our brothers and sisters...whose homosexual orientation is causing them pain and
confusion…we pledge our willingness to help you…to try to find new ways to communicate the truth of Christ because we believe it will make you free. We respect you in your struggle…"

The Beginnings of New Ways Ministry

After a year of working on gay and lesbian issues at the Quixote Center, Gramick and Nugent established independency in 1977 as a not-for-profit educational organization in Mt. Rainier, Maryland. Mugavero’s letter inspired Nugent and Gramick to look for “new ways” to minister to homosexuals, and subsequently New Ways Ministry constituted to “provide an educational locus to enable the non-gay community to learn more about the hidden minority within our church and society.”\textsuperscript{45} The Quixote Center staff supported their full-time ministry as a justice group, and wrote that they were proud of NWM’s work. Gramick and Nugent were doing the work of Jesus and doing it well by “ministering with gay Catholics, people whom our society and our church force to occupy the ‘outcast/leprosy’ position which Jesus made so much a focus for his ministry.”\textsuperscript{46}

Initially few Catholic social justice groups publicly endorsed NWM. At the 1976 Call to Action meeting in Detroit a caucus of social justice groups met and discussed current projects. Bill Calahan from the Quixote Center introduced Gramick and Nugent’s ministry that reached out to gay and lesbian people. Silence—no one in the room responded. Other social justice groups would not touch the sexuality issue. War, peace, and poverty would become acceptable justice issues, but even today sexuality and by extension related reproductive issues are often excluded. Progressive Catholics had diverse responses to sexuality and reproductive issues, splitting over abortion and homosexuality. Women religious were the initial and most ardent supporters of NWM, and gradually additional social justice groups collaborated with NWM.\textsuperscript{47} By 1977 Gramick and Nugent were officially incorporated into the controversial issue of homosexuality and the church.

Besides \textit{Persona Humana} and Mugavero’s letter, Catholic conferences, dioceses, and individual bishops offered their support to help Catholics “cease and desist from discriminatory activity.”\textsuperscript{48} As early as the spring of 1974, the National Federation of Priests’ Councils recognized gay persons faced discrimination in all levels of society. The council stated, “Be it resolved that the National Federation of Priests’ Councils...expresses its opposition to such being the basis of discrimination in employment, governmental service, housing and child rearing involving natural or adoptive parents.” And the same year, the National Coalition of American
Nuns pronounced, “It is immoral and should be illegal to discriminate against any person because of his or her sexual preference.”\(^{49}\) The United States Catholic Conference Department of Education Young Adult Ministry Board issued a bold remark the same year citing that “[The Gospel] calls us to be with gay men and women who are alienated form the community because of frequent expressions of fear and hatred based on myth and questionable Scriptural interpretations.”\(^{50}\) Bishop Walter Sullivan of Richmond, Virginia, summarized the sentiment, “The issue before our community and the commission, however, is not the morality of a person’s sexual orientation, but rather a person’s rights and protection under the law.”\(^{51}\)

One of the more controversial professions of toleration emerged from the United States Catholic Conference “A Call to Action” in October 1976. The consultation made recommendations that the church work on its pastoral needs to homosexuals, specifically by encouraging and affirming “the pastoral efforts of Dignity, the organization of gay and concerned Catholics, to reconcile the church with its homosexual brothers and sisters,” but as stated earlier, Catholic social justice entities were not entirely ready to embrace sexuality, instead, relegating the issue to the realm of pastoral, meaning private, care.\(^{52}\) The Call to Action conference intended to mobilize reform, but perhaps it exemplified an increasingly fragmented Catholic Church a decade-plus after the Second Vatican Council. Progressive Catholics felt that their dream of an open and caring church inspired by their interpretation of Vatican II was coming under increasing scrutiny by reactionary traditionalists. Indeed, not all progressivists were “open and caring” towards gay and lesbian Catholics.\(^{53}\)

Attempts at consultations and dialogue often ended in failure as a hoped-for unified progressive voice splintered between those more radical and those more compromising. The calls for the “ordination of women, married priests, acceptance of divorce and artificial contraception, and equal rights for homosexuals” as well as a complete ban on U.S. arm sales to other countries, aid for Latin American economic refugees, and a more even distribution of wealth were demands for the people of the church beyond what traditionalists could take seriously.\(^{54}\) If progressivists had intentions for compromise and shared responsibility in the spirit of Vatican II, only divisions were reinforced. The practice of dialogue was supposed to be the beginning of a process that would lend a vast improvement in communication and solidarity between the hierarchy and the rest of the church. In fact, oftentimes it muffled the process. The majority of traditionalists abandoned the progressivists and tightened their authoritarian control,
while progressivists continued their reform efforts with renewed intensity (sometimes breaking with the official church). Each side left a substantial moderate contingency more confused than ever with few interlocutors initiating confabulation.\textsuperscript{55}

Gramick and Nugent represented the progressive culture of Catholicism in the 1970s and religious who were unwilling to dismiss their vision of a modern church. Although Gramick and Nugent’s theology and ministry was progressive, they described their work as providing middle ground for dialogue very much in the collegiate spirit of what they thought mainstream postconciliar Catholicism should be. NWM’s unique position provides historians a glimpse into the Catholic Church struggling to define its stance on homosexuality in an unsettled postconciliar era. The early history and context of Gramick and Nugent’s religious lives and ministries alludes to skills they would develop throughout their careers: negotiating power structures and weaving through transparent and opaque politics.

Gramick and Nugent’s apostolate was provocative, and working within the controversy they recognized their ministry would not offer final solutions for gay and lesbian Catholics and the church. They initially hoped to at best generate questioning and further study.\textsuperscript{56} NWM intended the questioning provoked by lectures, conferences, publications, and retreats to open up a dialogue between gay and straight Catholics, laity and the church hierarchy, and instigate a discussion amongst religious. Gramick and Nugent disagreed with particular official church doctrines on sexuality, and as a result of their discontent, NWM lacked official support from Rome. However, they did join other priests and nuns, including those in their own communities, and a handful of bishops to work with Catholic gays and lesbians. Fellow religious supported NWM and in good conscience considered themselves moral, faithful Catholics. After all, Gramick and Nugent’s respective religious communities shared a commitment to “work for oppressed people.”\textsuperscript{57} The collegiate model of communication for decision-making processes was at the core of Gramick and Nugent’s faith and NWM’s work. The church constituted the people of God and all were invited and encouraged to participate in conversation—specifically a dialogue of inclusion, but a deliberation often tinged by dissent.

Nugent described laity and religious’ disagreements with church teachings as “the new element of the church today… Before when they [Catholics] disagreed, they left. Now, they’re dissenting and staying in.”\textsuperscript{58} Of course, “staying in” depended on the extent and type of dissent. Like many essays and biographies on being Catholic and gay, when Barbara Zanotti, the editor
of *A Faith of One’s Own: Explorations by Catholic Lesbians*, was asked if she identified as a Catholic, her reply was “both no and yes.” And like many gay and lesbian Catholics who had become disenchanted with the church, she instructed, “No, I am not a member of the institutional Catholic Church, but yes, Catholicism lives in my bones along with my working class origins and my mother’s Irish heritage. Given the milieu in which I was raised and my own immersion in Catholic religious practice for thirty-seven years, in a very real sense I cannot not be Catholic; the imprint is simply and indelibly there.” While Zanotti’s purpose in *A Faith of One’s Own* was to explore the “complexities of our [lesbian Catholics] dual identity,” people like Gramick and Nugent worked to reconcile competing identities, arguing a person could be both wholly gay and wholly Catholic—fully spiritual and fully sexual.

Gramick dedicated her life’s work to reconciliation (also working to reconcile her own relationship to the institutional church). In a 1980 *Washington Blade* article, a gay and lesbian periodical, she stated, “There’s a need in our Church to give an example to everyone that you can have an opinion that’s different from what the Church officially says.” After Vatican II, dissent, conflict, and difference of opinion became for some Catholics an embodied part of a Catholic identity. Reformers like Nugent and Gramick viewed the inclusion of multitudinous opinions as a healthy measure of the church as diverse people of God. Diversity was not supposed to be a paralyzing characteristic of the universal church. They hoped that through intended dialogue small changes would take place, eventually initiating understanding, tolerance, and resolution.

**NWM’s Model for Reconciling Ministry**

NWM was driven by a motivation for legitimacy, in this case acknowledged rectitude within their religious communities and a need to function carefully within the boundaries of the institutional church. Gramick and Nugent’s tripartite model for ministry and reform: 1) humanizing gay and lesbian Catholics by listening to their stories while taking their experiences seriously, 2) presenting homosexuality within a social-scientific context, and 3) evaluating moral problems and ecclesial perspectives were all dependent on a model of open dialogue. In the first step of ministering Gramick and Nugent preached that Catholics must carefully listen “to the personal stories of lesbian and gay persons.” “Gay people,” commented Gramick to a reporter, “become human beings’ when other listen to them.” Supporters of NWM like Father Inghilterra hoped that the definition of pastoral care would “continue to grow and be informed by
true human experience.” He and NWM understood theology as something developing from the needs of people and church teachings as malleable and open to human experience. Therefore when the National Conference of Catholic Bishops released a pastoral letter on moral values entitled “To Live in Christ Jesus” in November 1976, human experience was not entirely void. Like Persona Humana, it solidified the distinction between homosexual orientation and sexual behavior, while insisting that such issues needed “a special degree of pastoral understanding and care.” This distinction would at first be encouraging for reconciling groups as bishops promised that they would work to “lessen both the fear of and condemnatory attitudes towards homosexual men and women” and set an example by not discriminating against homosexuals. The foundation of Gramick and Nugent’s ministry was peoples’ lives—people who were often rejected and wounded by the church.

In the mid-1970s the church was beginning to address homosexuality, and NWM was careful not to discount the progress. The co-directors considered their ministry safely within church parameters but were not always open about their work. Gramick admitted that sometimes she was “in the closet” about her ministry. She sheepishly added, “If I’m at a party, I’m apt to just say that New Ways is a ministry for social change and minorities.” Many Catholic leaders walked a “tough tightrope” between upholding homosexual acts as sinful but the homosexual as a human being “who should not suffer discrimination and should be encouraged to be active members of the Christian community.” Separating behavior from orientation was not always an easy distinction for pastoral priests and some bishops. Gramick and Nugent upheld he distinction in public, but recognized the potential for emotional and spiritual damage if a person was told to accept who they are but not be who they are. Father Raymond Kemp bluntly summed up the tension: “The issue’s got me by the gonads.”

The issue was confusing for many religious who recognized the need for pastoral sensitivity, but lacked information on sexuality. For instance, Rev. Stephen C. von Fauer of St. Anthony’s Parish in rural Sheldon Springs, Vermont, wrote NWM in the fall of 1983 concerned about city folks moving to his country parish who, in his words, suffered from “homophobia.” Von Fauer’s lack of understanding regarding sexuality, homosexuality, and gay and lesbian identities was evident; nonetheless, he wrote making efforts to learn how to provide better pastoral care. The priest explained to NWM that his moral judgments about “homophiliacs” changed when a friend with five children was dying and “only a known hemophiliac offered blood and saved his
life.” Von Fauer admitted that he “disliked this homophile because of his mannerisms,” but the priest saluted the compassionate and heroic action.\(^{70}\)

Not only did NWM work with pastoral ministers, but also with laity as letters and phone calls from desperate Catholics confused about their sexuality and the state of their faith poured into the NWM office. For example, Jim Sexton from Philadelphia wrote Nugent in 1983 confessing that he had debated leaving the church, especially since he was deeply pained that he could no longer partake of the Eucharist. “Now I am almost convinced that the Church has nothing to offer me,” wrote a defeated Sexton. “It just seems that ‘they’ feel that if they continue to ignore homosexuality it will go away. I haven’t been to Confession for over a year. I was tired of being told I was sick, I needed psychiatry, I was a deviate, etc.”\(^{71}\) In cases like Sexton’s, Nugent and Gramick provided critical counseling and suggested local resources such as Dignity chapters or sympathetic priests. Yet there had to be educated, competent, and caring clergy to respond to such needs, and much of their energies were spent educating those in religious life about how to offer pastoral care to Catholic gays and lesbians and their families.

**New Ways Ministry and Education**

Through successful workshops and popular publications, NWM brought together priests, religious, and lay Catholics who had different theological and philosophical opinions, as well as personal experiences with gay and lesbian issues. It was their hope that if religious, priests, and bishops could meet gay and lesbian Catholics, listen to them and hear them—that would be the first step towards reconciliation. Nugent passionately illustrated the problem:

> They [Catholic gays and lesbians] are imbued with the symbols and the signs and the stories of the church. They have also grown up in the church – it is their church. They feel so alienated and cut off by the church, and it is not that they hate the church at all. They feel that the church does not want them. I always say the first step is to listen, and just as well, the gay community should listen to the church. It is a two-way street.\(^{72}\)

It was not just gay and lesbian Catholics who were confused and pained, but also parents who would ask the pair, “Would you meet with me?” Gramick and Nugent consoled parents, reassuring them that, pastorally speaking, the church was concerned. They pointed to the U.S. Catholic bishops’ *A Vision and Strategy* or the 1978 document that ministered to “hurting families,” which referenced homosexuality among other issues.\(^{73}\) But not all documents translated to practical, pastoral responses. Neither did documents take into account the experiences of Catholic gays and lesbians. Much of their work with frantic parents involved
reassuring worried mothers and fathers that they should still love their child. After relieving parents’ fears concerning the fate of their child’s soul, they slowly guided parents into a deeper discussion and investigation into the subject. Retreats and workshops were the preferred educational forums where Gramick and Nugent hoped the sharing of personal experiences and eventual acceptance could take place.

Gramick and Nugent traveled the country speaking to a wide variety of audiences ranging form Seventh Day Adventists, ecumenical retreats, Dignity conventions and chapters, to smaller workshops in dioceses, retreat centers, or welcoming Protestant churches. NWM workshops were indelibly Catholic in perspective, ritual, and theology; however, on occasion non-Catholics participated. Typically a good mix of lesbian and gay people attended—both closeted and out. Heterosexuals also made up portions of the audience, but typically were interested in the issue because either they had family members who were gay or attended for ministerial reasons (teachers, parish ministers, parish workers). Attendees were middle-aged to older, mostly women religious, and occasionally included a scattering of courageous priests. The type of workshop given by NWM depended on those in attendance. Nugent reflected on the most effective type of workshop: “Anybody could come. But a lot of gay people found it incredibly supportive and therapeutic to come. Even if they said nothing, but to just sit there during the day and to hear other Catholics say positive things and good things. It was very therapeutic.”

Nugent cautioned that workshops were not gay and lesbian support groups, but the workshops were effective and therapeutic for heterosexual Catholics as well. A common workshop scenario ensued when a straight person expressed the effectiveness of a powerful conscious-raising session. For example, in a small group a lesbian woman might share how she was kicked out of the house or hated by family members. “It was eye opening for them,” reflected Nugent akin to a psychologist who had just had a break through with a client, “because it might have been the first time they heard a gay person speak.” Sometimes attendees would blurt out that they didn’t know any gay people. Nugent would calmly respond, “Yeah. You do. You just don’t know you know them.” Gramick and Nugent determined small group work effective when a heterosexual person would admit, ‘Wow, were my eyes opened when this young [gay] man told us about his history.’

Of course workshop attendees interests, comfort levels, openness, and experience with activism were varied. Mary Ann Fleetwood, an out lesbian women, attended a NWM workshop
in 1977 and while she appreciated NWM efforts for dialogue, she left feeling a bit invisible. Fleetwood conveyed to NWM, “The dialog I thought showed that straight people were really willing to learn, and the whole topic was NOT charged with a lot of emotionalism you might expect.” She thanked NWM for the work they did for bridging gaps in the gay and straight community. “In fact,” she concluded, “I wish I could be more involved with this type of work myself since I am convinced that homophobic attitudes can wreak havoc in the lives of gay people—and most often they do!” But Fleetwood remained bothered by the workshop presenter’s use of “they” when referring to homosexuals or when workshop attendees would talk about “them” in front of her. The pronouns had an alienating effect and she did not want to be lone spokesperson for the gay community; instead she advocated a stronger participation of gay people in the workshops to balance the dialogue—a fair critique given the eclectic audience.78

According to the NWM model, after one was able to take the experiences (both blessings and sufferings) of their gay and lesbian brothers and sisters seriously, then workshop attendees studied homosexuality within a social-scientific context.79 Gramick and Nugent informed readers and listeners about developments in the social sciences, as well as in anthropology and biology, which they assumed crucial credentials for influencing public opinion. “If we can ever find out how ‘natural’ the homosexual orientation is, it would be a great influence on the church’s teaching,” admitted Gramick.80 While it would be easier to affect church teaching if homosexuality was biologically determined, Gramick did not discount the importance of cultural constructions. “It is imperative,” she wrote, “to understand the social fabric from which the lesbian or gay person emerges.”81 In fact, Gramick and Nugent organized studies on homosexuality for purposes of collecting data, insisting that research was “crucial in augmenting our knowledge of homosexuality.”82 NWM procured funding for their first few operating years from a $38,000 National Institutes of Health, Department of Health, Education and Welfare grant, allowing Gramick and Nugent to direct a “two-year sociological study of the ‘coming out processes and coping strategies’ of homosexual women.”83 Because much of the previous research had focused on gay males, Gramick was concerned that what little information that existed on homosexuality should not be automatically applied to “gay women.”84

Driving their research was a motivation for legitimacy, specifically legitimacy within their religious communities.85 It was a bit ironic, or perhaps revealing, that a ministry like NWM used the pretext of social-scientific studies to convey the experiences of gay and lesbian
Catholics—an understanding of experience that was ideally to have already been gleamed in pastoral care situations. Many workshop attendees were naïve in their understandings of sexuality and same-sex love; therefore, a combination of understanding personal experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics along with social-scientific data was an effective educational strategy, especially for a church, in Scott Appleby’s terms, “recently reawakened to the secular wisdom of the behavioral sciences.”

This was even more true for women’s religious communities who, according to historian Amy Koehlinger, had been applying “sociology and psychology as tools to evaluate and shape religious life” since the 1950s. Sisters’ reading lists included not only theology, but titles from the behavioral sciences. Sr. Eileen J. Cehyra, FMI, Provincial Superior of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate in San Antonio’s letter to Gramick expressed the effective strategy of including sociological data. Cehyra shared how much she enjoyed a fall 1984 NWM workshop and disclosed, “My own very limited knowledge of homosexuality led me to misunderstand much of the problem. It was only because of the injustices perpetrated that I gave any thought to the issue at all. Your own faithfulness to Church teaching coupled with a sensitivity to the plight of the homosexuals and the scientific data you presented has helped my own attitudes to open up considerably.”

Gramick and Nugent wanted to demonstrate that being gay was “a valid expression of a person’s lifestyle involving more than the simple notion of sexual preference,” and challenge “the ‘illness’ approach that has characterized so many similar studies in the past.” They insisted that their social-scientific study was in no way “in clear violation of the teachings of Christ and His Church.” Just the opposite: it revealed an oppressed minority that needed to be brought to the church’s attention and perhaps served to challenge traditional Catholic sexual ethics. The final step in the NWM model was dependent on the previous two: the evaluation of moral problems and ecclesial perspectives could only be considered after taking both the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics and developments in the social sciences into account. “They [Gramick and Nugent] made no moral judgments, but simple laid the facts out before us; the teachings of the Church, history, scientific facts or a lack of them,” wrote one workshop attendee. Nugent conveyed the same message when he carefully explained to a reporter, “We [New Ways Ministry] don’t advocate any” approach…we take the careful position of raising the issues and having the people discuss them.” If Gramick and Nugent refused to comment on or reveal their personal moral and sexual ethics positions to the press, they did carefully discuss these
questions in their workshops if the audience was not “too intimidated by the moral question.”

In workshops Gramick and Nugent presented the church’s position that severed sexual orientation from behavior, but felt compelled to discuss alternative theological and scientific options.

NWM workshops for Dignity chapters could be more relaxed. The outline of the workshop given to Dignity/Central Pennsylvania in Oct. 1976 made note that “New Ways predominately presented to straight groups”; thus, Gramick and Nugent revised the schedule because they assumed participants were probably aware of the psychological, anthropological, and sociological perspectives. The outline for this particular workshop also categorized the traditional, moderate, and revisionist theological perspectives on same-sex love, asking participants “1.) Which theological position do you feel most comfortable with? 2.) How can gay Catholics minister to people identifying with each of these three potentials?”

Although NWM upheld the Vatican’s distinction between sexual orientation and behavior in print, this does not mean that their ministry did not face harsh scrutiny by traditionalists that opposed their ministry, specifically their presentations highlighting various moral theologians’ positions on sexuality. Angry dissenters determined NWM to be “a clear violation of the teachings of Christ and His Church.” Some detractors went so far as to condemn retreat and workshops as “satanic” and defiling. Such attacks and ugly sentiments only bolstered New Ways Ministry’s point—Catholic gays and lesbians faced serious discrimination and condemnation. For heterosexuals and religious attending a NWM workshop, the opposition and name-calling allowed them to experience and verify the blatant oppression they were learning about in small groups.

Gramick and Nugent were always working to “establish credibility as competent ministers” who were “really reputable” and possessed “a lot of credits.” They had to prove their ministry as justifiable resource in the face of seemingly insurmountable theological and authoritarian obstacles. As one reporter foretold, Gramick and Nugent were “like modern Daniels entering the lion’s den.” Counseling Catholic groups about homosexuals in their church was a risky journey of faith, and Gramick and Nugent embraced the risk, even possible martyrdom. It was a perilous journey that many religious also traversed. NWM initiated the conversation about gay and lesbian issues by encouraging sisters, brothers, and some priests to extend the issue beyond the brief workshop. Pat Gallagher, RSM wrote Gramick and Nugent.
acknowledging the difficulties of their ministry. “I realize that working in the area of gay ministry you are walking on what many people regard as thin ice,” commented the sister. Despite the controversial nature of the topic, many religious initiated their own study and even ministries as a result of working with NWM. For example, Gallagher discussed with other sisters who participated in a NWM workshop “ways to introduce the questions of ministry and gay Catholics in this area.” Ray Lambert of the Paulist Fathers of Washington, D.C. also attended a workshop in the fall of 1976. However, he offered suggestions for including more spiritual elements to Gramick and Nugent’s presentations, specifically supplementing opening and closing prayers or liturgy. Notwithstanding his desire for modifications, when Lambert returned from the workshop, his response was positive. “The questions our brothers hit us with all through supper were amazing,” he excitingly reported. “There is a definite need for clarification, demythologizing, etc. of homosexuality by experienced personnel like yourselves. I feel the priestly candidate who has attended a workshop you present will be so much better prepared for ministry.”

Gramick and Nugent counseled workshop attendees on basic understandings of sexuality from a variety of theological and scientific viewpoints. They fielded thousands of questions regarding human sexuality, ranging from what does “homosexuality” mean to what causes same-sex attraction to how to talk about sexuality. Sr. Fara Impastato, OP who taught at Loyola New Orleans wrote Nugent in 1979 to ask about how to counsel young college students who experience ambiguity regarding “physical feelings towards other human beings.” She wondered if NWM has thought about this and how she should help “these confused young persons—who seem to be vaguely, uncomfortably ‘bodily’ in a neuter-gender, either gender kind of way?”

NWM’s work also included providing counseling to religious questioning and exploring their own sexual consciousness and identities within a same-sex celibate context. James Mausolf, OFM’s experience was not unique. He offered his support for NWM and confessed to Nugent, “I’ve been struggling with my own gayness for 20 years, and only recently became satisfied with myself as I am – even quite pleased about it all.” Mausolf’s “road to this new contentment “was paved for him by the work of the Salvatorian gay and lesbian ministry and Dignity/Milwaukee.

Educational Programs and Negotiating Authoritarian Control
While smaller NWM workshops at retreat centers, convents, and monasteries were executed with little controversy, more public events and workshops in conservative dioceses generated public relations frenzies. NWM’s early association with Dignity did not alleviate the controversy. In a 1976 workshop for Dignity/Central Pennsylvania, Gramick expressed her satirical delight in the publicity they generated in the area: “We heard that this workshop has been banned in Harrisburg! We have spoken to parishes, at seminaries, houses of formation, convents, colleges and universities, at conferences for selected groups of ministers, given lectures open to public; but never banned!”

On another occasion Cardinal John Cody of Chicago banned a NWM workshop from taking place in a parish hall. The subsequent cancellation was the first for NWM. The Rev. Thomas Libera, chairman of the Association of Chicago Priests and the Conference of the Laity, objected to Cardinal Cody’s presumed dearth of pastoral concern. In what would become a familiar pattern, the forbidden workshop was held anyway, albeit at an alternative location. The publicity surrounding each controversial event might have scared off higher-profile attendees (such as bishops or parish priests). The attention, however, most likely guaranteed a greater number of willing participants frustrated with a punitive institutional church.

A particular early confrontation with church hierarchy came in 1979 when NWM was planning a retreat for lesbian nuns. The idea for the retreat came from the Sisters of Mercy leadership who, as Gramick remembers it, when asked if they would sign an endorsement for NWM’s work on gay and lesbian civil rights, heartily agreed—determining nothing wrong, nor controversial about it. The Sisters of Mercy challenged Gramick and Nugent to extend issue beyond lay gay and lesbian Catholics, asking Gramick, “What about the lesbian sisters and gay priests within the church community?” In response NWM organized the first Lesbian Nuns Retreat, and Gramick informed appropriate religious congregations and superiors of the event. But word of the surreptitious retreat spread quickly—it was not long before Gramick and Nugent underwent their first formal investigation by the Vatican just two years into their official ministry. Five women attended the Lesbian Nuns Retreat on May 4-6, 1979, in Hyattsville, Maryland, at the Convent of Jesus and Mary. Texas-based School Sister of Notre Dame Charlotte Doclar, a sister in her mid-40s who embraced her lesbian and feminist identity, attended the secretive retreat with the blessing of her Mother Superior (to whom she had previously come out). The experience was so positive that Doclar took a year off from teaching.
and the convent in Houston and moved to Washington, D.C. to work as an intern for NWM. She later returned to the Dallas province in hopes of serving as a resource for other lesbian sisters. Within convent walls the subject of sexual identities—nevertheless lesbian identities—was still taboo, and finding sisters brave enough to talk about it was rare.  

What was not atypical, however, was the intrigue and publicity surrounding the concept of a “lesbian nun.” Naturally, the Lesbian Nun’s Retreat generated unwanted attention as news of the event leaked out, even though a similar retreat for men generated much less anxiety. The controversy and subsequent investigation into NWM was negotiated through a buffer zone of hierarchy between Gramick, Nugent, and the Vatican’s Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. Gramick’s provincial, Sister Ruth Marie May, SSND had faithfully supported Gramick and NWM for several years, but Lesbian Nuns Retreat in the spring of 1979 was more than she could handle. The provincial released a letter prior to the retreat addressed to religious whom she knew who had received notice and the press release from NWM announcing the retreat for gay women religious. “Unfortunately,” Sr. May wrote:

Sister Jeannine and Father Nugent arranged for this retreat and advertised the dates for it without consulting those of us who are responsible for decision-making on contemporary issues involving women religious. Publicity which uses such terminology as ‘gay women religious’ I see not only as offensive and misleading but ultimately detrimental to the present image and role of celibate women in faith community. It is a matter of the upbuilding of the minister and ministry of women versus prevalent opinion of gayness in our society. ‘Gay Women Religious’ is likewise a confusing and contradictory phrase, since most people generally accept the term ‘gay’ to mean homosexually active, whereas ‘women religious’ have already taken public vows to be and remain celibate.

The provincial was concerned that the public would misconstrue, even sensationalize, a distorted conception of a lesbian nun. “While we do not deny that this orientation exists, we are nowhere near the time when we or the general public are equipped or integrated enough to handle the suspicions which this publicity evokes,” quipped the provincial. “I conclude by stating my belief in a ministry to homosexuals, men and women, but because of the very nature of this apostolate it is an involvement requiring prudence and patience, or it will be counterproductive.” She feared the developing slow educational process would be jeopardized by the concept of lesbian nuns. The same month Gramick wrote Sister Ruth Marie May, SSND apologizing for the slack the provincial was receiving for supporting NWM. Gramick admitted to her superior she was nervous to talk to her about it, but during their discussion she felt more
relaxed. “I know you have to consider the larger picture but at the same time I know you believe
this ministry is important and I appreciate your caring and concern for this marginated [sic] group and your interest in all social justice issues, “ commented Gramick. I’m sorry that you
have to bear the misunderstanding and complaints of gays and non-gays; that’s all part of the
ministry. Thanks for sharing it with me.”

The Vatican’s Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (CRSI) notified
both Nugent and Gramick’s superior generals, ordering the leaders to have the retreat canceled
and forbidding Gramick and Nugent to participate. Gramick’s superior general Mother
Georgianne Segner called provincial Sister Ruth Marie May about the notice. Although Sr. May
was unhappy with the publicity, she did not tell Gramick to cancel the retreat. She only conveyed
that the CRSI wanted it canceled. Subsequently, Nugent received a letter from his superior
general in Rome who enclosed several questions regarding the work of NWM to be answered by
Nugent. Suspicious of the questions, Nugent wrote back asking if they were the Very Rev. Fr.
Gerard Rogowski’s inquiries or given to him by unknown sources in Rome. Because the
questions were not the superior general’s, Nugent ignored the questions as he did not know
where they came from or where they were going. The Salvatorians and Nugent did not follow the
order to cancel the retreat, but Nugent withdrew from the event to avoid controversy. “They [the
CRSI] figured if they had the priest out, there couldn’t be a retreat,” commented Nugent. “Well
they obviously didn’t know this nun.” Dozens of letters on NWM’s behalf and in support of
the retreat poured into the National Catholic Reporter’s editorial staff, NWM office, and
Gramick and Nugent’s religious provincials.

The retreat might have been a success but provincial leader Sister Ruth Marie May
remained unhappy about the publicity. In June 1979 she wrote Brian McNaught, a Catholic gay
activist and friend of Gramick and Nugent, expressing her dissatisfaction after eight years of
support. She explained to McNaught why she thought the lesbian nuns retreat should have
avoided garnering publicity:

Because of my roles in religious community for those years, I know what I am asking
when I request that the convening of ‘gay women religious’ be kept out of publicity at
this time. Men have already ‘made it’ in ministry an in society, and therefore they can
afford to have their retreats for the homosexual among them. Their advertisement was
also done in a more sensitive manner. ….Knowing that you realize that there are many
oppressed groups in the world today, including the church, I hope you will understand—
though you cannot put your self in our place—that women religious could well do
Gramick and Nugent would negotiate levels of opacity and transparency throughout the legacy of NWM and their work for social reform. Support varied depending on the publicity generated or feared. Religious such as Rev. Myron Wagner, SDS of the Provincial Board wrote the Very Reverend Father General Gerard Rogowski, SDS in support of Nugent and the gay women religious retreat, but just as many letters expressed caution or even hate. The conflicted Sister Ruth Marie May, SSND was not quiescent about the issue and also wrote Mr. Ronald Lawrence on in late May 1979 stating, “I do know of many instances of Jeannine’s presence to gays and her good work all over. I am trying to support New Ways Ministry, but in the matter of publicity on retreat for ‘gay women religious’ I must differ. My reasons are many, but in summary, the struggle of women religious to gain status in the ministry is jeopardized at this time by publicity of this sort.” The provincial was correct; the idea of “gay women religious” was too fantastic and unfathomable for many Catholics. For instance, Sister M. Agnes wrote NWM about the publicized retreat, mincing no words:

It is with much, much regret that you seemingly Catholic religious are proclaiming such heresies. There is no place for a homosexual in Catholic religion, lay or religious! How can a religious be a homosexual? What is wrong with you! Remember Our Savior said it is better that a man not exist rather than give scandal to even one…Do some introspection [sic]—get to a normal religious and live the Gospel, not a perverse life. It is highly regrettable that you are promulgating the life of sin. Beware!!”

While such reactions were rare from members of Gramick and Nugent’s own religious communities, condemning reactions were expected from traditional Catholics involved in conservative to traditionalist Catholic organizations. The Catholic Laymens League of St. Michael the Archangel and St. Maria Goretti were particularly upset that NWM had planned a retreat with the Sisters of St. Joseph at the Rockhaven center nestled in the Missouri Ozarks. The angry letter directed to Nugent, Gramick, and Dignity is worth quoting at length:

Dear Perverts of the sex act and of the Catholic Faith,
You are going to burn in hell for all eternity for what you are doing…How dare you use a Catholic university newspaper to flaunt your perversion…Give up this perversion and embrace family life that is your only salvation. We will not allow you to use Catholic holy places. We have notified Cardinal Carberry of all that is going on with you…We
will stop you one way or another. If the Cardinal doesn’t stop you we will all be out there when you are having your so called retreat and believe me we will stop you physically from entering the grounds of Rock Haven. You are sick people, you need psychiatrists [sic] and prayers. You commit terrible sins against Jesus and Mary. Our group will get you, each and every one of you. How do you think you got the name faggots because they used to burn you at the stake. It is better to burn at the stake then to burn in hell for ever [sic]. We are praying for you and we are fighting you tooth and nail.

The letter also contained an article that Gramick wrote called “Gay Women in the Church.” On a photocopy of the article, the Catholic Laymens League of St. Michael the Archangel and St. Maria Goretti had written “LESBIAN NUNS” near the top and typed inflammatory text over and around article:

This LESBIAN so-called nun and avowed homosexual priest are giving a retreat at the Sister’s of St. Joseph’s convent, Rock Haven, to a group of radical and practicing homos and lesbians in December. How can Sisters allow this perversion to take place in their holy convents? Have all the sisters gone lesbian? Is this why they want to take off their veils, smoke cigarettes, wear pantsuits, live in apartments and become communist agitators [sic]? The Sacred Hearts of Jesus, Mary and Joseph are pierced again!!! WRITE AND CALL CARDINAL CARBERRY URGING HIM TO STOP THIS SATANIC EVENT!!!!!!! OUR LADY WARNED OF THIS AT FATIMA AND GARABANDEL! HAS ST. LOUIS BECOME SODOM AND GOMORAH??!

The incensed detractors also underlined a portion of Gramick’s article that spoke of celibate “homosexually oriented women religious,” writing “HaHa” next to celibates as if it was an unfathomable notion. Gramick and Nugent refused to waste time in attempts at dialogue or correspondence with what they considered extreme, irrational, or disturbed responses to their work, but they did realize the topic of “gay religious” was particularly sensitive.

While Gramick and Nugent realized that pastoral care, education, and more openness regarding sexuality and sexual issues was needed in religious life, they were careful to concentrate their more public activities on lay gay and lesbian Catholics. This did not mean that religious did not talk about the issue within their own communities. If it did occur, however, typically such discussions were discretely executed, especially for male priests and religious orders. Father Walter Dolan, OFM, the rector from Our Lady of Angels Franciscan Seminary in Quincy, Illinois, wrote Jeanine expressing how much he enjoyed participating in a NWM symposium. He commented, “It was one of the more useful weekends that I’ve spent in a number of years. I saw a lot of implications for the Franciscans here in the Midwest.” Energized and concerned about gay and lesbian issues, Dolan proposed a local workshop on sexuality and
homosexuality to his provincial, because he “saw this as a basis for inviting Franciscans of the province, whose sexual orientation is homosexual, to form groups for the purpose of support.”

The provincial and council agreed, but Dolan needed more information on how to lead a workshop. Nugent suggested that Dolan contact the Capuchins of the Chicago province who were already holding workshops. Nugent encouraged Fr. Dolan and noted that, “several other communities have also initiated such support groups either officially and publicly or most on a more informal and confidential level. In either case they are needed and effective.” While Nugent did include information from their past day-long workshop, he cautioned Dolan, “Its purpose is to present in a non threatening manner the entire picture of homosexuality from a variety of angles including the social sciences, theology, and pastoral ministry.”

Sometimes these “angles” were informed by international collaboration. Gramick and Nugent worked closely with gay ministries in the Netherlands and England to develop official guidelines for pastoral responses. In 1979 Gramick and Nugent met with Bishop Augustine Harris and others in England and the Netherlands working with gay and lesbian Catholics. As a result of the collaboration, Gramick and Nugent published *Homosexual People in Society* and the Catholic Council for Church and Society of the Dutch Catholic Church published a staunchly progressive booklet explaining homosexuality within the context of human dignity. The Dutch committee recommended that the church should “reconsider its separation of behavior and orientation” in light of current social science work that suggests homosexual orientation was irreversible. The Dutch church was known for its grassroots efforts to meet the spiritual and civil rights needs of Catholic gays and lesbians, but also for the Vatican’s infamous disproval of their efforts.

Quest, an English gay Catholic organization comparable with Dignity, hosted Gramick and Nugent on several occasions. In order to accelerate same-sex issues to the forefront of the church’s conscience, Gramick and Nugent realized the issue had not to be just an “American problem” but an international issue. The pair met with international church leaders but also gay and lesbian Catholics and their families in Vienna, Warsaw, Munich, Budapest, Czechoslovakia, Prague, among others. On a visit to England in the early 1980s, they advised the clergy of England and Wales on pastoral guidelines for homosexual issues. The document “An Introduction to Pastoral Care of Homosexual People” reaffirmed church teaching, but the Catholic Social Welfare Commission went a step further by advising priests to differentiate
between “irresponsible, indiscriminate sexual activity” and “the permanent association between two homosexual persons who feel incapable of enduring a solitary life devoid of sexual expression.”

Nugent was encouraged by his British colleagues because of their deep pastoral concern for individual people set the priority rather than “an obsession with isolated sexual acts.”

In their publications, workshops, and interviews Gramick and Nugent initially upheld church teachings distinguishing homosexual orientation from behavior, but inexplicitly, their position was somewhat closer to the progressive Dutch. For instance, although they presented the church’s orientation/behavior distinction in their work, they disagreed with priests and bishops who used the teaching as a guideline to encourage reorientation or a change in sexual orientation. Although Gramick and Nugent endorsed the obligation of celibacy for both heterosexual and homosexual clerics and religious, they never explicitly commented on the moral questions regarding non-religious professionals expressing their sexuality. Gramick, along with most social scientists of the era, understood “rehabilitation” as an unrealistic therapeutic method leading to mental and physical damage. “Very few gays [could] or be happy within a heterosexual relationship,” explained Gramick. Additionally, Gramick and Nugent felt that church officials overlooked a complex pastoral situation in which it was more difficult for homosexuals to hear that their orientation was morally neutral only if they did not act on it. Nugent described the Vatican’s official pronouncement as a “kind of qualified acceptance” in which the church would accept gays and lesbians under certain conditions. Gramick, Nugent, and NWM supporters blamed the bishops’ pastoral disconnect as responsible for fueling gays and lesbians sense of hostility and rejection towards the church.

NWM matured within Catholics circles and aided the slow shift from church officials denying same-sex attraction as legitimate to allowing private contexts for individual counseling and network building. Yet NWM stretched pastoral care beyond the official teachings and statements of the church to embrace the fullness of humanity, specifically legislated through human and civil rights laws. The next stage was activism.

Experimenting with what it meant to minister in a post-Vatican II era, sisters did meet with gays in the convent, visit gay bars, coordinate home masses, and “chaperone” gay and lesbian dances. In the process they read social-scientific literature, psychological studies, and
emerging moral theologies, educating themselves about human sexuality and exploring their own desires through retreats and educational forums. Priests experimented with what it meant to provide pastoral care and appropriate counseling for gay and lesbian Catholics and their families. Some officiated mass for gay and lesbian Catholics and others served on priest’s councils that wrestled with negotiations between upholding clerical authority and the reality of gay and lesbian lives. Through the auspices of New Ways Ministry, Sr. Jeannine Gramick and Fr. Robert Nugent challenged these multiple facets of the Catholic community to stretch the boundaries of pastoral care and social justice initiatives to include lessening injustice and forms of oppression against gays and lesbians. Within an assumed homophobic Catholic culture, but also within the shifting currents of reform and renewal in religious life, Gramick and Nugent initiated dialogue and provided educational forums that discursively confronted the silence surrounding homosexuality and the church. For this particular community of Catholics “to be Catholic” meant emphasizing dialogue within many subcultures within the church as well as with the modern world. Religious professionals and lay Catholics’ understandings of same-sex love became a critical juncture of pastoral care and justice issues in post-Vatican II Catholic culture. By taking NWM as a portal into Catholic life, we can better understand negotiated identities situated in a complex Catholic culture in the final decades of the 20th century.
CHAPTER TWO: POSTCONCILIAR CATHOLICISM, LIBERAL SOCIAL REFORM, AND THE JUSTICE TRADITION

“I [Nugent] enjoy a battle now and then.” 1

For New Ways Ministry the pastoral minister was someone who counseled effectively and who was well read on a variety of church teachings regarding sexual issues despite the complexity and emotional reactions imbued in the polemical subject. Gramick and Nugent hoped that if pastoral ministers could acknowledge the physical, psychological, and social contexts for individual sexual ethics, “they have taken a significant step in providing sound pastoral care for individuals who might approach them for help in coping with homosexual feelings or experiences in themselves or others.”2 Beyond providing appropriate pastoral care, Gramick and Nugent expected activist and sensitive religious to engage on a more public level to end sexual discrimination and fight for individual privacy rights. Assimilationist strategies remained a component of NWM’s message that gay and lesbian Catholics were just like other (straight) Catholics, but they also shifted their focus to liberal social reform. Joining the protests of the Gay Liberation movement in the 1970s, NWM called for legal reform. By taking the fight to the courts, activists demonstrated gay and lesbian identities were different, but also self-assured and something to be proud of. Gramick and Nugent urged Roman Catholics to come of the closet in support of gay and lesbian rights.

Gramick and Nugent lived and developed a theology of action based on Catholic social ethics within Catholicism.3 The justice imperatives of Vatican II and Gaudium et Spes (1965) coupled with the Synod of Bishops’ Justice in the World (1971) were adopted by the pair working on behalf of civil rights for gay and lesbian persons. Timothy McCarthy points out that acting “on behalf of justice is a constitutive dimension of the church’s proclamation of the gospel,” and Gramick and Nugent interpreted their gay and lesbian ministry as an extension of doing the work of Jesus.4

Homosexuality and the Church: Careful Catholic Protest

This chapter demonstrates how the church’s sexual ethics tradition clashed with NWM’s interpretation of social justice praxis. For Gramick and Nugent, updating the church and renewing its mission for the modern world meant confronting and dealing with modern understandings of sexual identity. At times NWM employed a defensive tactic, but more often
Gramick and Nugent proactively set the tone of discussion, thus waging social protest on a discursive level. First, they supposed their emphasis on pastoral practice and language of care and concern combined with pertinent issues in church life, such as poverty, alcoholism, divorce, and racism, led to a type of openness in the church, at least led to exposure and education about these issues.\(^5\) Secondly, issues of social justice and peace were theological themes not just in the Catholic Church but many Protestant denominations of the 1970s. Theologians explored social justice and the renewal of social institutions on a theoretical level while leaders and activists experimented with reform. Religious and secular activists promoted moral imperatives within turbulent political and social climate, including campaigns against nuclear endearment, anti-war demonstrations, women’s rights initiatives, the Black Power movement, and a burgeoning environmental consciousness.

Like women religious who were reconstructing their religious roles and identities as American sisters after Vatican II, so too were homosexuals who according to political scientist Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, experimented with “identity-constructing influences of the 1960s.”\(^6\) From the founding of San Francisco’s the Council on Religion and the Homosexual in 1965, ministers began linking human and civil rights with gay rights. The result was a continuum of responses by individuals and movements ranging from reformist to more radicalized critiques.\(^7\) By the mid-1970s many mainline Protestant denominations had a type of gay and lesbian caucus or working group that had begun denominational studies on human sexuality, released position statements on gay and lesbian rights, or provided a social network and support group for gays and lesbians.\(^8\) Such initiatives within religious institutions were remarkably progressive and typically occurred in more liberal denominations. While some social commentators and historians have written that an era of radicalization declined, even died by the 1970s, thus making way for culturally conservative protest, quite the opposite was true in religious institutions.\(^9\) Many religious denominations underwent inordinate structural and ideological changes by pursuing interests, debates, and resolutions related to gender and sexuality.

NWM was aware of ecumenical groups working to affect change for lesbians and gays in religious institutions; yet Nugent was convinced, “that the problems we face are Roman Catholic questions and will have to be worked from that perspective.”\(^10\) Combined efforts of education, activism, and political maneuvering, proved to be the preferred means of social justice reform for groups like NWM. Gramick and Nugent did have an embellished vision that one day Catholic
gays and lesbians would be accepted, inclusive members of the Church. It was a hope based on faith, but the practical manifestation would entail a dramatic rupture in a long, entrenched tradition of moral reasoning and sexual ethics. They were also realists setting more cautious serviceable aspirations, but never giving up on or failing to articulate a broader radical social vision. This meant conducting most of their work and protest on the discursive level. Focused on modes of meaning-making, NWM structured a pastoral language of hope and acceptance for gays and lesbians within the church and developed educational initiatives expressed through lectures, workshops, and publications. NWM was pragmatic and their strategy involved influence-seeking work within the existing institutional structure. They lobbied for their ministry within the boundaries of the institutional church by relaying on networks of sympathetic religious and bishops. Radically and totally abolishing the institutional church was not an option--compromise seemed a more realistic goal.

With the founding of New Ways Ministry in 1977, Gramick and Nugent moved away from individual pastoral counseling to concentrate more on social advocacy work where they admittedly walked “a fine line between outright advocacy and neutrality.” NWM was an unabashed advocate for social justice, human rights, civil rights, and gay rights, but “strictly speaking,” clarified Gramick and Nugent, “we are not a ‘homosexual rights’ group but rather a ministry group.” The distinction was important because Gramick and Nugent did not consider themselves solely rights activists, but those who provided spiritual counseling, relevant research, and consultation services. The “ministry” distinction did not mean that civil and gay rights in church and society, specifically lobbied through legal channels, were not a core part of their ministerial agenda. In fact, Gramick and Nugent believed that their social justice ministry was vital for the contemporary church if they were “to take seriously the defense of ‘human rights’ enunciated by Pope John Paul II in his recent encyclical letter [Redemptor Hominis (The Redeemer of Man)].” They reinterpreted immorality and sin to be a “lack of social justice and charity that society manifests against the homosexual,” believing that their ministry was “called by the gospel and the charisms of our religious communities to identify with the poor and the oppressed, despite the cost in the pain of misunderstanding and even oppression from Church people.”

By focusing on education and civil rights issues more than the theological debates concerning Catholic sexual ethics, Gramick and Nugent personally saw “much hope for creative
political action and effective change.” In a 1977 lecture at the national Dignity convention in Chicago, Nugent outlined NWM’s strategies for enacting justice. He lessened expectations and advised against investing too much hope in church officials altering church teaching on homosexuality. “In the first area of official Catholic moral teaching on the goals and purpose of human sexuality, realistically I see little possibility of any immediate or drastic change regarding homosexuality or even sexuality in general given the long-standing scriptural and natural law teaching which holds sway officially in Rome and the United States,” stated Nugent. As historian Mark Jordan eloquently points out in *Silence of Sodom*, it would be unrealistic for gay and lesbian Catholics to expect (even through divine intervention) the pope to wake up one morning and vow to seriously consider the full experiences Catholic gays and lesbians, sexuality, and their complicated relationship with the church. Most Catholics were not so delusional to hold out for this miracle. Even with the recognition that such a dramatic change would take an act of God, the question remains, what were Catholic gay and lesbian ministries’ practical goals?

For NWM, Gramick and Nugent’s work was an exercise in discursive politics, or what Mary Fainsod Katzenstein describes as social protest organized around the “construction of a knowledge community.” NWM wanted to rewrite and reconstruct Catholics’ negative assumptions about gay and lesbian people. Attitudinal changes were best achieved through self-reflection exercises in workshops or counseling settings. This study of NWM challenges Katzenstein’s understanding of protest within the church, because Gramick and Nugent expressed activism not only through ideas, but also through liberal politics by strategizing, lobbying, and networking with sympathetic bishops and seeking out legal opportunities. Diplomatic politics sometimes worked, but in his 1977 speech, Nugent conceded that most American bishops had not been all that supportive. Nonetheless, he urged Dignity members to continue to engage in the theological debates and disseminate a variety of opinions while NWM worked on another level to nuance coalition building and lobbying. In the area of pastoral care, Nugent recognized resistance to the ideas of NWM and especially Dignity, but Nugent was always quick to deliver examples of significant progress emerging from progressive dioceses. Overall, Nugent attempted to remain optimistic, but honest in his public address, he detailed both the reality and hope for the future of civil rights and the church.

The priest first delivered the good news: the majority of American Catholics thought homosexuals deserved civil rights. Bolstering his case in the late 1970s were several favorable
articles and editorials in the Catholic press he shared with the audience as well as gay rights endorsements from the National Federation of Priests Councils, National Association of Women Religious, and the National Coalition of American Nuns. The Catholic press wielded significant influence in Catholic circles, and Nugent’s disappointing news entailed details about how a biased press limited the message and scope of Catholic gay and lesbian ministries. In the summer of 1977 Nugent accounted for “numerous articles opposing or limiting gay rights [that] have appeared under the names of such prominent Catholic authors as Michael Novak, Andrew Greeley and Dale Frances. He noted that, “even Fr. Richard McBrien from Boson, certainly not unsympathetic to the gay Catholic community” wanted to “draw certain lines when it comes to approval of gay lifestyles.”

More good news: a conversation on homosexuality and the church was underway. Gramick and Nugent became increasingly adept in their communication and public relation skillfulness set the tone of the conversation.

For the optimistic Nugent, the good news outweighed the bad. As NWM acknowledged a growing collection of official church statements on social justice, the question remained--how to apply them to the area of gay rights? Nugent was aware of social reform critiques, especially the fear that as long as NWM and Dignity framed the debate in terms of rights, not much revolutionary progress would be made in terms of overturning oppressive social institutions. In fact, their protest was conservative compared to more radical gay liberation political ideas about abolishing institutional structures and identities in society. While Nugent could see faults (primarily the snail’s pace progress) in the civil rights strategy, he was not willing to give it up. His ideas in the late seventies were what are now contemporary political and intellectual gay conservative positions on assimilation and civil rights. In other words, the political strategy that promotes the image “gays are just like you” popularized in the 1990s by gay male (and often Catholic) pundits, such as Andrew Sullivan, was the primary message of NWM two decades prior. Nugent commented to his audience, “Perhaps it is also a question of formulating a response that will show that officially approved gay lifestyles do not really alter the nature of human society by parodying the basic family unit [monogamous, paired].” Nugent avoided radical and potentially offensive language. He did not blame the church or express an ounce of anger in public, nor did he make sexual activity the primary issue. Gay liberation experimented with public performance, parodies on sex and gender, and freedom of expression. Gramick and Nugent were more retrained and instead focused on less threatening issues of human rights.
“Should the question be couched not solely in terms of rights, but in terms of the validity of alternate lifestyles (much like our right to lead a celibate lifestyle) which are not threatening to society’s deeply held and strongly felt values?” asked Nugent of his Dignity audience.\textsuperscript{25}

Nugent realized that gay liberation and gay rights movements of the late 1970s contended with debated protest strategies for social reform. The tension mounted between those that wanted to focus solely on legal reform and positive gay identities and those that wanted to include more liberationist protests as part of larger political, social, and countercultural movements denouncing institutions. The irresolution plagued LGBT activists from the beginnings of organizing through the present.\textsuperscript{26} For example, how much organizing effort should be directed at interrelated racial, class, and gender oppression, among others? In regards to the liberal elements of the Catholic community, Nugent warned that the questions were much larger that the issue of homosexuality or gay rights, but included all types of complicated questions surrounding issues of postconciliar reform and the dignity of human persons. Nonetheless it was his ambition that, “The powerful impact that liturgical changes have had in the lives of most Roman Catholics will be seen as mild when compared with the strong feelings aroused in all of us by talk and experiences of changing sexual values and mores. Both worship and sexuality are fragile but deeply rooted in symbolic expressions. Both can be trivialized, damaged, or even destroyed.”\textsuperscript{27}

\textbf{Catholic Coalition for Gay Civil Rights}

Unlike contemporary gay conservatives as described by Paul Robinson in \textit{Queer Wars}, Nugent and Gramick were unwilling to tolerate “the imperfections of the existing order.”\textsuperscript{28} The church was nowhere near successful in incorporating out gays and lesbians into the Catholic mainstream. The emerging concept of gay and lesbian identities in the Catholic Church remained and shocking to many Catholics taken aback my the mere mention of the church leaders addressing issues of homosexuality. The recognition of lesbian and gay Catholic identities had immediate political and religious implications that challenged the church’s understanding of inclusion and sexual ethics.\textsuperscript{29} Gramick and Nugent attempted to ward off and temper pejorative implications by setting the tone for discussion. In order to incorporate Catholic peace and justice groups and progressive Catholics in matters of Catholic gay and lesbian issues, NWM organized a growing network called the Catholic Coalition for Gay Civil Rights (CCGCR) in 1978 as a strategy to get church leaders to publicly commit themselves to civil rights and raise awareness.
within the church. The Catholic community, especially “pastors, theologians, bishops, religious women and men,” were invited by the CCGCR to join and “take the lead in describing and defending the civil rights of gay persons.”

The lengthy CCGCR statement proclaimed “the kingdom of God necessarily demands a vigorous public ministry of liberation from both personal and social forces that oppress people” and its authors ejected myths such as “the unfounded fear that homosexuality contributes to the breakdown of family life.” The statement prodded readers to pledge “to work for the elimination for discriminatory and unchristian attitudes and practices in our parishes, schools, diocesan offices, chanceries, seminaries, religious communities, and the Catholic media.” Individuals, religious groups, and communities were asked to unreservedly endorse the statement and, if possible, provide a financial donation. The signing of endorsement statements were common acts of public protest and solidarity in postconciliar American Catholic life. Protests ranged from statements calling for collegial representation, a plurality of views on abortion, or asserting critiques of *Humanae Vitae*.

For example in 1968 San Francisco priests of the Priest’s Senate wrote a position paper on the disappointing lack of collegiality, shared power, and decision making with episcopal leadership. Contemplative sisters signed a letter of protest on August 31, 1969, as action against the Sacred Congregation of Religious and Secular Institute’s (CRSI) decree *Venite Seorsum*, which limited the self-governing and cloister parameters for contemplative sisters. Probably the most infamous examples of signed statements have involved issues of gender and sexuality. Moral theologian Charles Curran drafted a statement protesting *Humanae Vitae*’s ignorance regarding the reality of faithful Catholics’ lives. Many U.S. Catholics feared the Pope Paul VI had arrived at the anti-contraceptive conclusion without taking the recommendations of a special commission designed to study the issue. Originally 87 theologians signed the protest statement, ultimately joined by 600 total people. Over a decade later the group Catholics for Free Choice ran a *New York Times* paid advertisement on Oct. 4, 1984, that summoned more dialogue and viewpoints on abortion and Catholicism. The signers, many of who were women religious, were threatened with disciplinary action from the CRSI to retract their statements. Moving through uncharted territory, the implicated sisters from various congregations joined together with their leaders to work out a response and strategy. When the general superiors refused to dismiss the sister signers, the CRSI was unprepared for resistance.
While such statements were not legally binding, they did illustrate a symbolic, collective moral protest shared by the signers. Groups familiar with Gramick and Nugent’s work became the first to sign the CCGCR statement, and women’s religious communities were the most enthusiastic and generous. Coalition underwriting came from diverse groups ranging from contemplative sisters to lay gay Catholics who sent money “as a way of protesting anti-gay sentiments coming from the pulpit of the parish church!” Abbot Edward McCorkell, OCSC wrote Nugent expressing a common sentiment held by signers of the CCGCR statement: “How sad it is that so many of our gay sisters and brothers are put in the same category as ‘untouchables’ in India, or as outcasts because of the deep-rooted homophobia that is so prevalent in our American society.”

NWM affixed supporters and contributors’ names to a growing list of endorsements appearing in Catholic periodicals. The CCGCR generated ample publicity and demonstrated a strength-in-numbers tactic by showcasing a variety of Catholics concerned about gay and lesbian civil rights. The CCGCR was a way to exhibit support without directly attaching NWM, Gramick, and Nugent to the initiative. Some, however, were confused about NWM’s involvement with the CCGCR, and in a letter to Brother Provincial of the Marist community in New York, Nugent clarified the relationship between NWM and the CCGCR. “The Coalition is a project of New Ways and is funded by grants from several religious communities of women and men who believe in what the Coalition is about.” Nugent noted, “The Claretians and the Xaverian communities have been the most generous with financial grants.”

The CCGCR ad, statement, and list of supporters ran in the Washington Star on October 14, 1979, and in the National Catholic Reporter on November 2, 1979. Not all NWM acquaintances welcomed the publicity, and anxiety over the transparent nature of signing the advertisement exasperated tensions within several religious communities. For instance, the CCGCR print ad listed an endorsement by the Paulist Social Action Center, when it should have read the Paulist Social Action Committee. Rev. Michael McGarry, CSP complained that although his group “tries to support local gay causes on occasion, such as Dignity get-togethers here at the Paulist Center,” they also tried “to be careful about the use of our name so that our energies be applied where they can make a difference and not in trying to explain public stands in the National Catholic Reporter.” In a letter to NWM, the Very Rev. Alan M. Eddington, VF explained that over 200 priests in his Wheeling-Charleston diocese received a copy of the
National Catholic Reporter with the CCGCR ad. On the front page of the advertisement, an anonymous note in red crayon exclaimed, “see page 6.” When the bishop turned to page 6, his name was circled. While nothing came of the threatening incident, Eddington reported the free publicity nonetheless.⁴⁰ Sister Elizabeth Meluch, OCD Prioress of the Carmelite Monastery in Indianapolis acknowledged that her entire community would not endorse the CCGCR, so she passed out the CCGCR statement to individual sisters. “On the more positive side,” she wrote Nugent, “I have to admit that I am surprised at your surprise at receiving so many names.” Alluding to geographical pockets of conservative Catholics and strategies for reaching those who might be sympathetic, she advised, “If your response from other communities, especially in the Midwest, is any different, may I suggest the following: Send the material to the ‘social justice officer’ instead of to the superior (she may be too busy to transfer it); make the statements less all inclusive.” The sister added, “We keep you in our prayers, knowing that your endeavor is difficult, and sure that the Spirit will effect the work that needs to be done.”⁴¹

The CCGCR statement effectively encouraged positive responses, but there were also detractors who voiced their strong disagreement with parish or religious communities that endorsed the CCGCR. The slippery slope between civil rights (the CCGCR statement) and progressive sexual ethics (implied through the CCGCR statement) was too dangerous. The Rev. James Ratigan of Priests/USA wrote to NWM explaining that the National Federation of Priests’ Councils had endorsed statements of qualified civil rights for gay persons in the past, but they could not endorse the CCGCR because it went “beyond the endorsement of civil rights and presents a number of opinions, which are not fully supported by the scientific community.”⁴² While responses like Ratigan’s were disappointing, yet polite, at the other extreme, hate mail often found its way into the NWM mailbox. For example, NWM received an anonymous letter from St. Margaret Mary Roman Catholic Church of Lamesa, TX stating, “NWM: PLEASE take us off your mailing list, since it offends us just to get your mail! The donation and INDOREMENT [sic] given in the name of our Parish was done in poor taste and definitely not what the majority of the congregation thinks or believes.” Concerned about a heated controversy at St. Margaret Mary, Nugent wrote to the president of the parish council to inquire about the anonymous letter. Fr. L. Hemp responded reassuring Nugent that a vote to support the CCGCR endorsement passed, but such animosity was “hardly typical of West Texas, but a lot of work is being done here!”⁴³
On another occasion, an incensed sister sent the CCGCR flyer back to NWM with her critique inscribed: “HOMOS ARE AN ABOMINATION! WORSE THAN ANIMALS! A PERVERSION SHOULD NOT BE EQUATED WITH A ‘LIFESTYLE’ MUCH LESS CONDONED!” Mrs. Louis J. Franta also returned a CCGCR letter to NWM, scribbling out “Catholic Coalition” and writing “Satan’s Coalition,” as well as penning “instruments of the devil” over the statement. She warned that NWM failed to honor the Vatican and accused Gramick and Nugent of being sources of scandal. “You are a disgrace to the name Catholic,” wrote an angered and disturbed Mrs. Franta. “You did not read my letter, nor the suggested Scripture passage. Besides, no where [sic] in the Bible, nor otherwise does God permit, or excuse the misuse of ones reproductive organs! Jesus said there would be wolves in sheep’s clothing that would lead His people astray. You are surely one of those wolves—you dirty cyote [sic]!” As if regaining her composure, Franta signed the letter, “Yours truly, Mrs. Louis J. Franta,” but in a postscript reverted, “‘It would be better for you if you had a millstone hung to your neck and you were dropped into the sea.’ Have you ever read The Bible? Jesus said that about people like you and your cohorts.”

If accused of evil and threatened with death were not enough, because the CCGCR statement was deliberately moderate—focusing on civil rights and omitting any discussion of sexual behavior—disenchantment with the CCGCR initiative also came in the form of assessments from those who thought the statement was excessively conservative. Many letters to NWM raised concern over one sentence in the third paragraph of the CCGCR statement which stated, “We believe that sexual orientation is at least as much a part of the human identity of some individuals as is color, race, sex, or creed.” Several people wrote to clarify that they believed sexual orientation was a part of all people and hoped that NWM would defend such a point. Mary Crane of Aptos, California, went a step further when she suggested Gramick and Nugent recognize and affirm a continuum of sexuality. Crane wrote, “There is a gay person in each of us. To endorse gay rights is not to endorse ‘others’ different from yourselves…The question any person claiming to be straight ought to think about is, ‘Why am I not able to love (in a consummatory [sic] or sexual way) someone of the same sex?’” Of course Gramick and Nugent could not ask already angered, confused, or scared heterosexual Catholics if they could imagine themselves sexually attracted to someone of the same-sex, let alone loving someone of the same sex. Crane’s suggestion does point to the contested meanings of sexuality, sexual
orientation, and sexual behavior within the framework of gay and lesbian liberation movements, not to mention religious institutions.

While people like John A. Kiley of Coventry, Rhode Island, could agree with the need for civil rights protections for gays and lesbians—after all, even the church acknowledged sexual orientation as innate—the ultimate state of a gay or lesbian Catholic’s soul was of greater concern for Catholics like Kiley worried about sexual behavior and activity. Kiley donated money to NWM, but he also wrote Gramick and Nugent expressing his qualified acceptance for their work, ironically offering his support of gay and lesbian civil rights if it helped gays and lesbians change their sexual behavior. He explained:

> Your demands for civil rights for homosexuals must be paralleled, of course, by ensuring their rights in the Kingdom of God. Homosexual Christians have a right to the full grace of God, and it would not be proper to sell them (or it) short by too easily condoning disordered behavior. An attempt to be kind and supportive to homosexuals must include a willingness to believe that homosexuals, like all believers, are called to transcend the disorders of this life by laying hold of the treasures of divine life. A laissez-faire attitude toward homosexual activity would provide an ultimate disappointment, cheating all involved. Your [CCGCR] statement is not clear on this point. As religious, as Christians, as Catholics, our concern cannot stop at civil rights but must press on to the total victory over sin and death promised in Christ.”

NWM purposely avoided a discussion of sexual behavior since Gramick and Nugent determined that shaping public opinion on same-sex sexual ethics was “much more complex issue than civil rights.” For the most part they left the contested realm of sexual expression to moral theologians, psychiatrists, and sociologists. Although NWM acknowledged civil rights and sexual behaviors were related (lobbying for sodomy law repeals for example), Gramick and Nugent responded to critics like Kiley by explaining that even celibate homosexuals still experience many types of oppressions. “It is these kinds of people we are hoping to help with the Coalition statements,” wrote Gramick. “Our statement is not clear on the point of homosexual behavior because it is in this area that there is so much discussion among theologians, pastors and many others.” The “behavior” conversation was avoided in print or in public, because NWM determined, “For us to take one strong-position would effectively cut off many others who wish to engage in dialogue and ministry without alienating others.”

Practically living out the CCGCR statement meant mobilizing opposition to anti-nondiscrimination bills such as California’s Proposition 6 and conservative spokeswoman Anita
Bryant’s 1977 anti-gay rights campaign in Dade County, Florida. 52 In spring 1978, Gramick helped Dignity counteract Wichita, Kansas, Bishop James Malone’s campaign against a gay civil rights ordinance. Bishop Malone intimidated Wichita Catholics into voting against the ordinance by intimidation and embarrassment: if they did not sign a petition, he implied they must be homosexual. 53 Gramick helped organize one hundred supporters, including many women religious who were threatened with termination for participating, to leaflet the Wichita Catholic churches after mass opposing Bishop Malone’s stance. Their acts of protest were imbued with religious significance as they fought on behalf of injustice, convening the day’s events with a liturgy and prayer service. 54

Civil Rights at City Hall and in the Parish Hall

By winter 1981 the CCGCR had 1769 individual and 115 group endorsements whose signers closely watched homosexual rights legislation in cities across the country. 55 Bishops and dioceses chose sides over anti-discrimination bills, and in Baltimore the ordinance forbidding discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation fell to defeat numerous times in large measure due to Archbishop William D. Borders’ persuasion. 56 NWM criticized Archbishop Borders for not defending human rights as backed by the 1976 American Catholic bishops’ statement. Gramick and Nugent assured supporters not to give up because Catholics should “either actively and concretely to promote the civil rights of homosexual persons in our society or face the accusation of hypocrisy, double-talk or outright continued persecution of homosexual persons.” 57 Catholics counting the characteristically progressive archbishop’s support for the anti-discrimination ordinance were furious, accusing Boarders of representing bishops who would not “leave their ivory towers and listen to and learn from the experiences of gay Catholics and to respond to them in just, gospel centered ways.” 58

In the summer of 1980, Gramick, Nugent, Rev. Paul Thomas, and Rev. Joseph Hughes presented their testimonies before the Baltimore City Council in favor of Bill No. 177 prohibiting discriminatory practices based on sexual orientation. 59 Before the meeting they prepared and strategized their deliveries according to which council members were supportive and which members opposed, noting at least three council members “need to be urged to at least remain quiet on the issue.” 60 The team also wrote Catholic council members prior to the hearing, sharing statements of support for anti-discrimination bills from groups ranging from the Baltimore Episcopal diocese, Presbytery of Baltimore, NOW, and the YMCA of Baltimore. All
four testifiers quoted Catholic documents related to justice and liberation while stressing that they upheld and supported the church’s teachings on the morality of sexual acts. They each qualified that they were not at the council to discuss morality, but rather social justice and civil rights. Nugent testified, “We recognize and uphold the right of any religious community to pass moral judgments on human sexual activity, and also the right to influence the common good. …We do not see ourselves in conflict with our religions, however, when we uphold the issue of social justice and civil rights for homosexual persons. In fact we find this position to be in complete loyalty to Church teachings on justice.”

Rev. Paul Thomas’s remarks were similar. He affirmed, “The issue is not whether homosexuality is good or bad, healthy or sick, sinful or not. For Thomas, these issues had already been settled in sociological, psychological, or theological contexts. “Rather the issue before us today is whether every person deserves equal protection under the law, when they are denied access to employment, public accommodations, education, health, and welfare,” testified the priest. Gramick’s testimony was more forthright as she directly referenced Bishop Borders’ opposition.

…I support the civil rights of persons, regardless of sexual orientation because of my own religious convictions even though the highest official representative of the Catholic Church here in Baltimore has expressed his opposition to the proposed amendment because the Catholic Church traditionally teaches that homosexual behavior is immoral. Such reasoning would logically imply support for the civil rights only of those persons whose personal life conforms to Catholic moral teachings. Such a posture is provincial at best; immoral, at worst.

Regardless of NWM’s efforts, council members voted down the proposed Baltimore ordinance and again 11-7 in 1984. Not all bishops were gay rights legislation opponents. Archdioceses in cities like Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Minneapolis endorsed anti-discrimination ordinances because, in Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland’s words, “Discrimination against homosexuals continues and Catholics should be concerned about their civil rights.” In spring 1974 The Minnesota Committee for Gay Rights launched its organization from the Newman Center at the University of Minnesota with the help of Father William Hunt. Fr. Hunt organized supporters for the proposed gay rights bill even though the St. Paul and Minneapolis archdiocese urged city council to vote against it. By winter 1977 Archbishop John R. Roach changed his mind (after a literal pie to the face) in favor a gay civil rights bill on the basis of preserving the “dignity of the human person.” He urged Roman Catholics to “carefully avoid passing judgment on the inner moral state of any individual.”
Notwithstanding Archbishop Roach’s affirmation, of course not all Twin City lay and clerical Catholics were pleased. Sister Mary Bernard wrote Gramick in May 1979 to share her own research on gay Catholic groups in the Minneapolis and St. Paul area, enclosing editorial clippings from the NWM lesbian nuns retreat announcement, which were “not flattering, to be sure!” Sister Bernard was aware “of the intense hatred of gays” in her part of the country, and she blamed palpable discrimination on clergy who promoted intolerance rather than the mere impressionable laity. “Another enemy of the cause,” wrote an upset Sr. Bernard, “is Bernard Casserly, one of the editors of the Catholic Bulletin. She was upset that Casserly went out of his way supporting a Baptist Minister in opposing civil rights, even though Archbishop Roach came out boldly and publicly in defense of them. That’s on thing I can’t understand, how so many Catholics preferred to follow the dictates of a Baptist minister rather than their own beloved archbishop!” Sr. Bernard could not fathom why Catholics were breaking ranks on this issue and joining the Protestant religious right. The confused sister wondered if the defected were, “Good Catholics? Christians?” The pastoral concern for human rights and civil rights was inseparable for sisters like Bernard and bishops like Roach (not to mention an influential and ecumenical pro-gay lobby).

Despite a contingency of Catholic endorsement for gay rights bills around the country, Gramick worried about her relationship with her home diocese after her Baltimore city council testimony in favor of the anti-discrimination ordinance. She wrote Archbishop Borders on July 26, 1980, hoping to preempt conflict. “You may have read that I, as well as three priests, testified in favor of the legislation,” wrote Gramick. She included a transcript of her testimony and explained, “The scant press accounts of my testimony may possibly be misinterpreted as a personal criticism of yourself rather than an analysis of your position. The former was in no way intended, I assure you.” Borders proposed that he too felt that homosexuals deserved some level of protection; it was just that Baltimore Catholics needed to consider some of his qualifications for approval.

Two years after the failed Baltimore anti-discrimination ordinance, Borders confused Catholics when he attempted to distinguish his “obligation to respond” to Baltimore gay and lesbian Catholics’ “particular hopes and needs” from his aversion to gay rights legislation in perplexing and often public ways. The archbishop delivered an unprecedented homily to the Dignity chapter in Baltimore on their ninth anniversary exhorting members of Dignity to
appreciate that they were “members of the total community of God’s people on pilgrimage through time” and congratulating them on their desire “to draw closer to Our Lord through the sacraments.” Gramick seized the public relations opportunity, and the Baltimore Sun published her “Letter to the Editor” a month after the Dignity homily. She commended Borders for “his pastoral concern for Baltimore’s lesbian and gay Catholics,” and described a kind, generous archbishop whom she hoped would live up to the compassionate, at times progressive, public persona. Gramick continued, “Despite his opposition to the proposed Baltimore gay rights bill in July 1980, this church leader is genuinely concerned for the spiritual welfare of a hurting minority of Baltimore’s Catholics.” In attempts to smooth him over, “Hopefully,” she wrote, “continued dialogue with members of the lesbian/gay community may enable this sincere man to support some carefully worded legislation to protect the human and civil rights of approximately 100,000 of Baltimore’s citizens.”

Borders was not willing to consider gay and lesbian sexual orientation as a minority status, at least not like black and Hispanic minorities who were “discriminated against because of race, language, or culture.” Yet his attendance at Dignity’s mass was a bold move and encouraged some Baltimore gay and lesbian Catholics. The Archbishop appeared to have softened his views, and he even suggested on a television broadcast that he did not object to a city ordinance that supported the rights of gay and lesbians to equal housing. He did object, however, to “such rights in the work place,” as he was especially harsh in prohibiting the employment of gay and lesbian teachers in religious schools. NWM followed Borders’ developments closely and reported on his confusing public statements that would leave any reader with a love/hate attitude towards the Baltimore archdiocese. However just a year later, and due to the popularity and influence of NWM, the Archdiocese of Baltimore established an official diocesan ministry for gays and lesbians.

Individual religious and some bishops were able to support gay and lesbian civil rights because they could argue for promoting essential dignity of the human persons. Part of being human was to recognize one’s sexuality, which they argued was an unchangeable, natural component of a person’s being as based on the 1975 CDF document Persona Humana. Even if sexual orientation was unchangeable, many Catholics were not convinced people with same-sex attractions deserved equal rights, and they were particularly weary of personal and political gay and lesbian identities, rather than the more pathologized label “homosexual.” Even more
moderate Catholic theologians such as Gerald D. Coleman, SS, the former rector and president of St. Patrick’s Seminary in Menlo Park, California, summed up the skepticism and reservations for supporting anti-discrimination bills in what he called a “post-Dade County era.” He wrote in his 1978 book, Homosexuality—An Appraisal, “there is no ultimate point in uncritically baptizing ‘gay rights’ simply because they are currently common and propagandized.”

Perhaps the most infamous vociferous denouncements of anti-discrimination bills came from the mouth of John Cardinal O’Connor and his New York City archdiocese. O’Connor dedicated mordant homilies at St. Patrick’s Cathedral to anti-gay rights initiatives and clashed with New York gay rights activists throughout his tenure. Even Bishop Francis Mugavero of Brooklyn publicly denounced Intro No. 2, the 1986 bill that came before the New York City Council barring discrimination against homosexuals. Orthodox Jews, fundamentalist Christians and conservative Catholics worked together in attempts to defeat the gay rights ordinance, which passed 21-14. Writer Mary Mendola’s assessment summed up what many gay and lesbian Catholics and activists felt to be a hopeless situation. New York gay and lesbian Catholics hated that guard dogs, armed police, and what seemed to be futile demonstrations on the steps of St. Patrick’s Cathedral became ubiquitous and obvious signs of a church that refused to listen to the voices and experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics. Mendola and many others “ached at the level of ecclesiastical ignorance and violence” that was “capable of such ugliness.” For multitudes of Catholics like Mendola, the damage had been done: the institutional church had no redeeming value.

What constituted a worthy social justice cause? Blatant discrimination, hateful words, and unfair treatment of the powerless by the powerful all seemed to apply to Catholic gays and lesbians’ experiences. All one had to do was point to New York City. Some Catholics became disenchanted when the Vatican and local church authorities acknowledged social justice in the Third World, but ignored the local community, specifically the gay and lesbian community. One gay activist and devout Catholic frustrated with gay rights legislation in Washington, D.C. exclaimed, “The Pope and the archbishop [Hickey] like to make lovely statements about El Salvador, but their actions in the local community often say ‘Screw justice.’”

Gay Catholics in Chicago expected that because Joseph Louis Cardinal Bernardin dedicated his tenure to race and poverty issues in his urban metropolis, his empathy for civil rights could be channeled into gay rights. Not exactly—Bernardin towed the ecclesiastical line like most bishops.
in large and traditional archdioceses when he opposed the 1986 human rights ordinance.\textsuperscript{79} In fact, Cardinal Cody banned NWM\ s from Chicago the first time they sponsored a workshop in the archdiocese, and the event made the pages of the \textit{Chicago Sun-Times} and \textit{Chicago Tribune} several times whenever they came to the area. Bernardin did, however, demonstrate efforts to reach out to gay and lesbian Catholics.\textsuperscript{80} The cardinal was a complex figure and leader who could not be pegged into a traditionalist or conservative Catholic camp, especially when one considers his relationship to NWM and gay and lesbian issues. For instance, he formed the Archdiocesan Gay and Lesbian Outreach (AGLO) in 1989 after the archdiocese disassociated from Dignity/Chicago. This was a rather late move given Vatican directives in 1986 ordering bishops to forbid Dignity groups to meet on diocesan property. Seemingly not terribly pained by the ousting, most Chicago Dignity members transferred to AGLO.\textsuperscript{81} And while Bernardin upheld the church’s teaching separating orientation from behavior, he did acknowledge that “sexuality is also intrinsically relational—it draws people together.” He recognized the complicated nature of human sexuality beyond sexual expression and broadly conceived that sexuality “might be understood as a capacity for entering into relationships with others.”\textsuperscript{82}

Sister Louis McGovern, OP in Chicago was not convinced of the cardinal’s supposed enlightened attitude. In the “Letter” section of \textit{The Chicago Catholic} Aug. 8, 1986, she conveyed her sadness at “Cardinal Bernardin’s response to the legislation to protect the civil rights of gay men and lesbian women.” For many Catholics church teaching distinguishing homosexual orientation from behavior legitimized civil rights legislation, because no person was to be discriminated against for who they were. “The term ‘sexual orientation’ has nothing to do with behavior,” reminded Sr. McGovern.

Sexual orientation is either heterosexual or bisexual or….Just as there are heterosexual people who are celibate, there are homosexual people who are celibate. Yet their civil rights are jeopardized by simply being homosexual. To my knowledge, when discrimination exists, no one asks about bedroom behavior…The Church’s position at this time muddies the water. While it proclaims that homosexuality is not sinful, it would discriminate against those of such orientation. I wonder where the dialogue the cardinal calls for will take place? And with whom? And will it really be dialogue?\textsuperscript{83}

While it was true that a public objection to the gay rights bill by the cardinal would make it difficult to pass, some felt Bernardin was being judged too harshly for upholding the Vatican’s position on gay rights initiatives. Thomas W. Flynn’s editorial in the \textit{Chicago Catholic} explained
the tension. “The Chicago Tribune recently printed a psychologically abusive cartoon of Cardinal Bernardin. The cartoon depicted the cardinal burying gay rights. It was a grotesque misleading and untrue caricature of the cardinal’s position…” Flynn accused the paper of anti-Catholic sentiment and blamed the paper for marking Catholic leaders as easy targets. “The Chicago Tribune would not have dared to depict a black minister or a Jewish rabbi in its cartoon. Yet black ministers led demonstrations in front of City Hall against the ordinance. Rabbis also called their aldermen and some saw them personally and opposed their ordinance,” wrote Flynn. \(^{84}\) Flynn’s assessment was probably correct, but the Chicago cardinal held a celebrity-type status as a leader of the massive Catholic presence in Chicago, and his opinions influenced a substantial voting population.

Local cases like Chicago had national implications for the fight to lessen homophobia, and Gramick and Nugent lobbied on a local and national level for gay rights bills. They also kept an eye on particular Catholic cases concerning fair practices and discrimination. For instance, Rita Halbur, a nurse of two-and-a-half years with the Good Counsel Health Center in Mankato, Minnesota, was fired in 1981 because it was rumored she was a lesbian. \(^{85}\) Gramick took particular interest in the case, because the Good Counsel Health Care Center was a retirement home for the School Sisters of Notre Dame, and wrote Halbur expressing her disgust at how members of her community acted, putting Halbur in touch with “open” women who were School Sisters. \(^{86}\) As demonstrated in Chapter One, Gramick took a special interest feminist and lesbian issues, carving out a place for women within the male dominated gay rights movement, male dominated Dignity chapters, and a male priesthood and church hierarchy. \(^{87}\) She realized female sexuality was largely ignored by the heterosexist--often homophobic--public and church who was obsessed and at the same time repulsed with exaggerated ideas about what defined “gay sex” (typically perceived in derogatory gendered gay male stereotypes: anal sex, rampant promiscuity, and illicit behavior). In the gay liberation and gay rights movements that for an extended period of time ignored lesbian women’s experiences, coupled with a traditional church mindset that relegated women’s roles and opinions, there was little chance a celibate nun’s sexual orientation would be acknowledged--let alone respected.

**Legal Action as Social Reform**

Gramick and Nugent were noticeably aware of Catholic women’s issues and their work was not far removed from issues of women’s ordination, gendered representations of God, and
the larger feminist movement in the church. Nugent explained that NWM tended “to put a little more emphasis on lesbians,” because so much of the organizing was done “by males and for males, and in fact, the Gay movement has become almost identified as a male movement.”

Perhaps Gramick and Nugent intuitively understood what religious studies professor Mark Jordan recently underscored: lesbian women religious had a more nuanced understanding of sexual issues anyway. NWM and Dignity developed one of the first lay lesbian retreats in November 1978, and soon after the retreat, NWM constructed a “model retreat” with non-sexist liturgies and feminist prayers. Gramick and Nugent not only addressed the educational needs of laity, but they were also perceptive to the needs of religious beyond the initial lesbian nuns retreat. Attuned to the distinct culture of women religious, NWM offered several retreats for “gay women religious” in hopes of addressing “the special need for religious to meet as a unique group to tell their own stories of spiritual and sexual growth in an open and trusting environment.”

As demonstrated in Chapter One, educational retreats were NWM’s preferred forum for addressing pastoral care issues and setting an inclusive tone for dialogue about gay, lesbian, and Catholic identities. Besides offering numerous types of different retreats, NWM collectively worked with dozens of women’s religious orders and justice and peace networks for gay rights as well as forming their own groups for support and activism. After returning from the 1978 national Dignity convention in, Gramick explained to her apostolate director Patricia Flynn that she had met several sisters who were working with Dignity. Flynn, who would later become Gramick’s provincial, then superior general, and probably the SSND leader who most aided the sister through negotiating magisterial intervention, offered her unconditional support for Gramick’s ministry. As a result Gramick held a meeting for sisters working in gay ministry at the Baltimore Mother House. The 15-20 sisters who attended the small gathering organized Sisters in Gay Ministry (SIGMA). The network was “an association of religious and lay women ministering within the gay community” established by NWM in 1978 that lasted nearly a dozen years.

After NWM hosted a May 1981 retreat for Catholic lesbians in Yarley, Pennsylvania, at which women acknowledged that Dignity did not meet all of Catholic lesbians’ visions for reform. Inclusive language, feminist issues, women’s participation, and the overwhelming ratio of men to women were particular issues for women in Dignity chapters across the country. To
address the general invisibility of lesbian women within the church, six months after the May retreat NWM helped organize a national conference for Catholic Lesbians specifically to affirm their “unique identity as Lesbians of Catholic heritage.” Karen Doherty and Kristine Nusse who met and worked together at Dignity/New York drew up the proposal, and over one hundred women, including representatives from Argentina and Canada, attended the conference at the Kirkridge retreat center in Bangor, Pennsylvania, in November 1982. Doherty remembered the event as not only legendary, but sacred. The woman-centered faith community excitingly believed that they stood at a unique and transforming moment in Catholic history. Sister of Mercy Theresa Kane delivered the keynote address, urging women to recognize the creative moment for women in the church and called for the church to recognize the inherent dignity of womanhood as well as cultivate new understandings on images of God. Acknowledging that the secular feminist movement initially disregarded lesbians, viewing them as a menace to heterosexual feminist issues, feminist theologian Mary Hunt’s address encouraged attendees to extend Catholic women’s issues to include lesbian identities.

Due to the success of the conference and letters of interest, Doherty, Neuss, and NWM launched the Conference of Catholic Lesbians (CCL), which served as a clearinghouse for lesbian and Catholic resources as well as organizing regional groups and conferences. Moreover, the founders hoped that the CCL “would be more than an institution with names and contacts” but instead create a space and a source “to preserve histories, myths, and stories.” CCL participated in numerous events to promote visibility and community ranging from Gay Pride marches to Women-Church activities. They educated Catholics and the church about sex discrimination and homophobia as well as introduced parts of the secular lesbian community to lesbian Catholics. The women who were active in CCL did not separate issues of “Catholicism, feminism and lesbianism” from what they called “human issues.” Writer Mary Mendola cautioned that attendees of the 1982 conference were not returning to their parishes and work blatantly declaring their sexual preferences, but she optimistically warned that the issue would not remain silent much longer. Predicting a radical restructuring of the church, Mendola foreshadowed, “The institutional church will have more that feminism to contend with.”

Catholics, Courts, and Controversy

Mirroring the larger liberal gay rights movement, measured hope for reform often came in the form of legal action. An educational, spiritual and pastoral transformation might have been
taking place, but a large part of NWM’s success and public recognition was generated by their willingness to fight discrimination with legal action. The institutional church presented no legal options from within its structure, but the impasse did not deter some Catholics from using the American judicial system to file and try injustices experienced at the hands of the church (particularly exemplified in the priest child abuse scandals at the start of the 21st century).99

Gramick and Nugent restrained from suing a particular diocese, but they did use the legal system to stir up media attention, bringing forth issues of bias and discrimination because they worked in the controversial realm of sexual ethics and sexuality. The First National Symposium on Homosexuality and the Catholic Church held in Washington, D.C., November 20-22, 1981, exemplified both the church’s burgeoning openness to gay and lesbian issues as well as tested Gramick and Nugent’s ease at navigating the legal system.100 The Holy Trinity Mission Seminary in Silver Spring, Maryland, served as the original location for the symposium, but the event was rescheduled for the National 4-H Center in Bethesda, Maryland, when projected attendance grew to over 50 religious congregations and Catholic organizations participating and sponsoring the event. 4-H officials refused to host the conference once they discovered the topic for the symposium was homosexuality, despite a contract for use in hand by NWM. Meanwhile, NWM moved the symposium to a hotel, but organized a legal team to sue the National 4-H Center in the U.S. District Court for breach of contract. NWM lost the civil suit, despite hoping to generate sympathy from an African-American judge. The legal battle did, however, generate needed publicity. It also brought to light rumored assumptions that the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C. had so much disapproved of the symposium that its leaders pressured the 4-H Center to back out of the contract.

Despite the change of location, they symposium was a success. NWM advertised the meeting as an educational conference and opportunity for dialogue; yet, in order to stay within the parameters of church teaching and maintain an adequate level of participation, presenters avoided discussions of sexual morality and behavior.101 Reports from the symposium tended to focus on celibacy issues as attendees took “pains to distinguish between homosexual orientation and actual practice.”102 Archbishop Hickey of Washington, D.C. disapproved of the event and wrote a letter to the American bishops explaining his reproach of NWM. Nevertheless, “the symposium was endorsed by more than 40 national Catholic organizations or religious communities” and approximately 200 persons attended, ranging from doctors, counselors, to
brothers, sisters, and priests. Some bishops were reluctant to attend because of Hickey’s renunciation of the event.\textsuperscript{103} Despite the supposed “safe” academic and educational nature of the program—rather than a forum for advocacy, political action, or strategy—the archbishop’s displeasure with NWM had only just begun.

The taboo topics of sexuality and sexual ethics within Catholic circles made talking about heterosexual love, let alone same-sex love, more than difficult for NWM. Gramick and Nugent realized that a language needed to be created to give voice to an invisible minority in the church and society and set the tone for a common Catholic dialogue. Pastoral counseling sessions, educational workshops, and their work with Dignity chapters were not significant venues for mass messages of social change. Progressive Catholic audiences could trace the increasingly popular topic of homosexuality among theologians and some psychiatrists in periodicals like \textit{The National Catholic Reporter} and \textit{Commonweal}, but what little the lay Catholic population learned about “the homosexual lifestyle,” much of it came from what the faithful read in their influential diocesan newspaper’s editorial pages. With few exceptions, most opinion pieces expressed condemning, exaggerated, and confused understandings about a perceived homogeneous and dangerous gay population. Gramick and Nugent relentlessly wrote editorials and articles defensively explaining the work of NWM, but because bishops controlled the diocesan newspapers, editors implicitly understood the limits of which topics could be covered or that they wanted to cover. A few exceptions aside, NWM often felt that they were treated unfairly by a Catholic press that granted more coverage to detractors rather than supporters of gay ministry. NWM made efforts for inclusion and equal representation in order to give voice to Catholic gays and lesbians who felt alienated from the church and minds of the readers. Expression in print, however, had to be negotiated through legal efforts and formal complaints.

Dr. James Hitchcock, a professed conservative Catholic and history professor at St. Louis University, published a piece the \textit{St. Louis Review} on September 19, 1980, that referenced Dolores Curran’s previous week’s column, which had addressed a mother’s concern that her daughter had come “under the influence of a lesbian.” Curran’s column recommended Gramick and Nugent’s publication \textit{Homosexual Catholics: A New Primer for Discussion} and the resources of NWM.\textsuperscript{104} “Readers may be interested to know,” warned Hitchcock, “that New Ways Ministry not only ministers to homosexuals but regards homosexuality as a morally acceptable way of life. In the past its activities have been officially disapproved by the Archdiocese of
Washington.” Just in case Gramick and Nugent missed Hitchcock’s rebuke, alert friends sent copies of the article to the NWM office with a note of concern. Gramick and Nugent enjoyed a battle now and then. They rarely missed a chance to clarify and justify their ministry in hopes of repairing a damaged reputation in print—all the while developing savvy public relations skills. The St. Louis Review published a letter from NWM challenging Hitchcock’s “gratuitous and unfounded assertion” about their pastoral ministry in which Gramick and Nugent acknowledged that their ministry was “sensitive and at times controversial” but a price to pay for “effecting healing, reconciliation, and justice.”

Nugent privately wrote Hitchcock requesting a burden of substantial proof for his accusations as well as an apology and a clarification in a future column. “We are distressed when individuals like yourself make unfounded accusations or deal in innuendoes which further hinder a sensitive and difficult ministry,” wrote Nugent. “We believe that the kind of tactics that you indulged yourself in your column under discussion are unbecoming an individual of your own academic status, and we feel that they serve no purpose in your own efforts to promote sound renewal in the Church.” Hitchcock responded with a curt note. He demanded documentation of official approval by religious superiors and NWM’s position on homosexual practice as distinct from sexual orientation. An incensed Nugent refused to assent to Hitchcock’s request as it seemed to him that providing Hitchcock with documentation changed the professor’s original accusations and unfounded assertions. Nugent explained to Hitchcock, “We assume that if you have already made the charge then you either have documentation already to justify it or if not, then we repeat our request for a public apology.” Hitchcock refused to recant, apologize, or include a statement NWM’s position in his column. In fact, he published an antagonistic rebuttal on October 17, 1980, entitled “Minister to Homosexuals to Justify Correction for Group” in which he portrayed NWM as a heretical organization with scant credentials. While not completely convinced adequate representation could be achieved or libel proven, Nugent proceeded to file a discrimination case against the St. Louis Review with the Catholic Press Association in hopes that at least the action would generate publicity. In fact, it generated a win. No compensation was given or an apology printed, but the simple satisfaction of recognized discrimination was enough for Gramick and Nugent.

A similar case resulted with Our Sunday Visitor (OSV), a still-functioning Catholic publishing company that produces a national weekly newspaper as well as magazines,
pamphlets, bulletin inserts and the Catholic Almanac. In mid-October 1981, Nugent wrote Felician Foy, OFM of the Catholic Almanac confronting the Almanac’s avoidance of NWM. “For the past year I have been attempting to ask for an inclusion in our National Catholic group in the listing of similar groups that appears in the Almanac,” protested Nugent. “You promised that we would be included in the new one for 1982 as far back as last January. You also promised to send us forms for completion. Now you write and tell us that you have decided not to include us because you are not doing ‘major coverage of homosexuality.’” Assuming foul play, Nugent confronted Foy: “We were not requesting major coverage, but simply an inclusion in the listing along with other groups….I might be mistaken but having been in the work for almost ten years I think I have a certain sense for discrimination and the subtle ways it manifests itself. I hope that this is not the case here but frankly from all that has happened thus far it is difficult for me not to conclude that fear and injustice are at work.” He registered a complaint with OSV President John F. Fink who responded to Nugent’s allegations by defending editorial control. “It appears to me,” wrote a defensive Fink, “that this was an editorial decision on Father Foy’s part. He has editorial control of what goes into the Almanac, and I am not going to second guess him.” Nugent minced no words in replying to Fink and blamed him for furthering injustice and prejudice by failing to provide significant explanations.

Nugent was granted editorial space in OSV on Jan 17, 1982, but Our Sunday Visitor readers’ published responses were infelicitous. A disquieted E. Mann from Beechwood, Ohio, wrote:

The co-director of the New Ways Ministry complained in a recent letter to your paper that OSV was guilty of bias and lack of sensitivity regarding issues of homosexual and gay ministry. In the first place, that word gay is a misnomer; it should read pervert. I ask him, why should there be a special ministry for that group any more than there should be a special ministry for fornicators or adulterers or thieves or any other group of sinners? Actually, there is and always has been in the Church a ministry for that group; it is the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance).

A similar response in the same 1982 Valentine’s Day edition of the OSV by Mr. and Mrs. C.N. Santos of Oakland, California, reported, “If Father Nugent and those who ‘minister’ to people caught in the bondage of homosexuality truly love these unfortunates they will let them know that Jesus loves them and wants to set them free from these terrible sins.”

Again Nugent responded to the OSV, specifically the editor Richard McMunn, in February 1982 clarifying NWM’s position while accusing editorial contributor E. Mann of
“violating the dignity of human people by using the word ‘pervert,’ (similar in tone to ‘nigger’ and ‘spic’)... If the sacrament of Reconciliation is a ministry for the practicing homosexual, what is the ministry to heal the pain and hurt to human dignity by calling people ‘pervert?’”

In an effort to clear up misunderstanding and take advantage of an educational moment, Nugent offered his expertise and his own article on ministries to gays and lesbians for OSV, but allotted print space was unlikely. Father Vincent J. Giese, Editor in Chief wrote two months later explaining that the OSV was not open to articles on gay ministry at the time. “Given the conservative nature of our readers,” wrote Giese, “I don’t believe you would be the best spokesman for the question. It doesn’t mean we aren’t interested in doing something on the issue but I would prefer to start with a less controversial author.” In a last attempt, Nugent responded to Fr. Giese expressing his disappointment, especially since his articles have appeared in the Catholic Digest, a more conservative publication that OSV. “I am happy to hear anyway that you are open to something on gay ministry from a less controversial author although, frankly, I consider myself quite middle of the road on the topic,” concluded Nugent. “I suspect it is the fears and anxieties that the topic arouses in many people that generates a reaction such as those of the recent letters that you printed.”

NWM requests for retractions, corrections, or editorial space in Catholic periodicals, some more conservative than others, were never-ending endeavors. On another occasion Msgr. Muth of Riviera Beach, Maryland, wrote editorial for The Catholic Review in which NWM staffers found several errors and false accusations. In a letter to the editor of The Catholic Review, Nugent clarified NWM’s position: “The only ‘stand’ that New Ways Ministry takes is a stand for justice and reconciliation. We promote what Archbishop Weakland calls a ‘dialogue among the grassroots level, our pastoral ministers, and academic people in all fields so that all sides can contribute to a deeper understanding of this complex moral issue.’” Nugent offered his educational assistance as readily available for concerned persons such as Msgr. Muth, but the offers for dialogue did not get very far. The Catholic Review published an editorial by Mrs. Phyllis Fagan of Pasadena on several weeks later. Mrs. Fagan wrote:

After reading Fr. Nugent’s reply to Msgr. Muth’s letter concerning ministering to the gay person, I feel compelled to respond to Father Nugent. I’m not a theologian nor religious scholar. I simply know what the Word of God says and it is stated very clearly in Romans 1: 26-28 and Leviticus 18:22. It also states in Romans 10: 9-11 the good news to solve these problems, or better stated, sin. God loves the sinner but hates the sin and so would we. So to Father Nugent and all others who reach out in love to anyone who is under the
burden of sin do as John the Baptizer did in Matthew 3. Teach repentance of sin and a reformation of life.\textsuperscript{120}

If Gramick and Nugent were not defending the work of NWM through editorials and legal action, they were often fighting to keep their personal reputations in high regard, and this entailed avoiding any questions about their own sexuality. Both Gramick and Nugent refused to divulge their sexual orientation in fear of alienating themselves from the heterosexual community if they admitted same-sex attractions or the gay and lesbian community if they claimed a heterosexual identity. However, as celibate religious, their sexuality was practically a category of its own historically immune and theoretically shielded from frank, honest discussions about sexual behavior and activity. Refusing to comment on personal sexual behavior, let alone orientation, Gramick and Nugent were able to negotiate many different subgroups of the gay and lesbian and Catholic communities. Yet their silence did not stifle rumors, especially in the conservative press as well as more liberal presses that wanted to assume Nugent was gay or Gramick was a lesbian.

In one instance, Blythe Batton, NWM administrator, confronted editors of the Long Island paper \textit{Newsday} in regards to a July 1983, story about Nugent that referenced his alleged self-acknowledged homosexuality. Batton wrote, “On page five that story sentence beginning ‘As for himself, homosexuality has been a “spiritual blessing”’ might seem to refer to a previous quote form Father Nugent. Such, however, is not the case…”\textsuperscript{121} Nugent also wrote the paper clarifying his ambiguous (but non-stated) position. The religion editor Mr. Berg did apologize for the confusion and claimed that he was quoting another priest whom he had referred to anonymously, but no public correction was printed.\textsuperscript{122} Batton wrote the editors warning that, “While we are not contemplating legal action against your organization and publication for defamation of character at this time, we are requesting that you publicly retract this allegation for your readership now that you have been formally notified of your misrepresentation.”\textsuperscript{123}

Even if legal action was possible or if there was an avenue for filing a complaint, NWM and other Catholic gay and lesbian groups did not always win their cases. According to NWM assistant Bro. Rick Garica, in the fall of 1986, a coalition of almost 200 Chicago-based Roman Catholics organizations and individuals who supported gay rights legislation was denied advertising space in the archdiocesan newspaper, \textit{The Chicago Catholic}. In a press release,
Brother Rick Garcia, BFCC stated, “Giving Cardinal Bernardin’s call for ‘public discussion’ about this issue, I was shocked and angered by the paper’s refusal to run the ad. Obviously, His Eminence prefers monologue to dialogue.” Garcia further attested that the ad was “in complete fidelity to Church teachings and well within the parameters of orthodoxy,” and filed a complaint against the Chicago Catholic with the Catholic Press Association’s Fair Practices Committee. The general manager of Chicago Catholic, Mr. Vincent Saputoo, clarified that it was not “regular policy not to accept ads which could mislead readers or cause division within the Church,” but Garcia was adamant that was division within the Chicago area church on gay and lesbian civil rights legislation. In a letter to Mr. Doyle of the Catholic Press Association, Garcia exclaimed, “Simply because the Chicago Catholic has convienently [sic] ignored this division does not mean it does not exist. We do not believe the ad would cause further division. It would facilitate discussion which hopefully bring about greater unity on the issue.” Almost two years later Garcia learned that the Catholic Press Association rejected his complaint since publishing codes affirm “the privilege of any editor to impose reasonable limitations on response rights in disputed issue cases.”

Gramick and Nugent recognized legal equality would not necessarily produce social change and needed tolerance, but they did hope that it would lessen violence and fears directed towards gays and lesbians. Gramick and Nugent attacked homophobia, discrimination, and irrational fear towards sexual minorities not only through counseling and educational efforts but also through legal reform. Freedom of speech, the right to testify, and the need for informed dialogue were all political strategies hard fought for NWM and other gay and lesbian ministries. The struggle was more than politics. Fundamentally, ideas of freedom, human dignity, and progress shaped the priest and sister’s religious visions. New Ways Ministry’s postconciliar ministry that included protest and reform efforts broadly fell under the categories of dialogue and dissent. Gramick and Nugent recognized the limits of protest mostly discursive in nature and explored the legal system for alternative options. While lawsuits were rarely successful, they were symbolic actions of protest and furthered discursive protest through media attention. The opposition did not cooperate in the conversation and refused to recognize the NWM model of authority, the significance of dissent, or Gramick and Nugent’s evolving vision of justice. Gramick and Nugent assumed that if conversation happened in multiple levels of the Catholic Church, NWM could place itself in the center of the discourse for maximum effectiveness.
Congregations would have to consider the issue of homosexuality and Gramick and Nugent wanted to be at the center of the educational process by encouraging dialogue through their counseling, publications, the press, conferences, retreats, lectures, and judicial rulings, but their ministry had to be carefully negotiated through diplomatic collation building and politics.

At first Gramick and Nugent’s strategy for reconciliation and reform was assimilatory in nature. It had to come from within church structure. Through counseling, educational efforts, retreats, and publications, Gramick and Nugent sought to change attitudes and raise consciousness about an invisible minority in the church. It was not that education and changing individual opinion was politically ineffectual, rather they shifted their ministry goals and nudged a Catholic community now further attuned to issues about homosexuality and the church to engage in public protest. Joining liberal strategies for social reform, Gramick and Nugent urged Catholics to remain engaged on the discursive level, but also make their voices more public in legal and civic venues. For this particular community of Catholics “to be Catholic” meant to participate in social justice initiatives and politics of dissent. A new type of Catholic identity emerged in the process: Not only were religious professionals talking about human sexuality issues in private or within the safe parameters of their communities, but they attended city council meetings across the county, marched in gay pride parades, advertised their opinions in national and Catholic periodicals, and filed their complaints in court. Religious persons helped write local and state political legal history by envisioning an inclusive future in their communities and church at the same time they demonstrated the extent to which religious and sexual identities were so much in flux in the final decades of the 20th century.
CHAPTER THREE: NEGOTIATING TRANSPARENCY AND OPACITY WITHIN THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH

“For the first time in modern history, Catholics no longer agreed on an answer to the question of what it meant to be Catholic.”

Gramick and Nugent framed their ministry with a postconciliar vision that defined the church as a diverse, but inclusive “people of God.” They also understood the church as an institution with distinct levels of hierarchy and organization, unlike a brand of contemporary gay and lesbian liberationists working to abolish and overturn entrenched social structures. Their postconciliar vision did not abolish institutional hierarchy, which was needed for the ordering of authority and leadership, but they envisioned better collegial processes and representation within reformed hierarchical structures. Gramick’s essay, “Changing Hierarchical Structures,” called on ecclesiastical leaders to exercise not only a type of servant leadership by listening to the experiences of the “people of God” but also make room for due process, dissent, and a more accurate representation of diverse Catholic voices within the institution.

Even if their prophetic visions of ecclesiastical reform pragmatically lacked hasty implementation, Gramick, Nugent, sisters, brothers, priests, and bishops negotiated their ministry (some more skillfully than others) within the ecclesiastical structure oftentimes to their advantage and paradoxically for their protection. This does not mean that such creative circumventions would not be painfully protracted, tense, frustrating, and at times, disappointing. American Catholic history is a history of negotiations within institutional church structure and outside the purview of church hierarchy. This is especially true in the later half of the 20th century when American Catholics could not agree on what being a Catholic meant in an era of war protests, shifting gender roles, and a burgeoning sexual revolution. To understand gay and lesbian issues and the church, or more broadly to critique the church’s assumed silence regarding homosexuality, one has to understand the intricacies of negotiated private and public boundaries.

Carefully and Quietly

Gramick and Nugent did not hesitate to ask for the greatest levels of support from entire Catholic organizations, religious communities, and even the Catholic press. However more often, their requests were met with individual endorsements and private commitments. For example,
Rev. David Hare, SJ once worked for the Jesuit Office of Social Ministry in Washington, D.C. and wrote NWM to give his personal support of the CCGCR, but he felt “That an official endorsement from the Jesuit national office would not fairly represent the views of even a significant minority of Jesuit opinion.” He did pledge to bring the idea of an endorsement before the board of directors, but he would have to be careful in whom to approach in order to avoid causing scandal, or worse, reprimand. “Carefully” and “quietly” became synonymous with the work of NWM and those that supported them. “We were extremely careful and we really walked that very thin line,” admitted Nugent, adding, “and I think we did it well.”

Gramick and Nugent’s success in creatively negotiating ecclesiastical structures is why NWM detractors were fearful of their moderate and influential status. Their dual commitment to the institutional church and the people of the church was attractive to many Catholics, especially women religious who were becoming increasingly familiar with ecclesiastical resistance to renewal in religious life and their own marginal status. Subsequently through solidarity and coalition building, many women’s religious communities would not rescind their support for NWM despite ecclesiastical pressure. To some extent, however, they had to be cautious. For instance, Blythe A. Batton, NWM administrator, wished Sister Marquerite Kropinak of the Sisters of Saint Joseph in Pittsburgh, good luck in hopes that all of her “subversive activities” prospered, reminding Kropinak, “Underground is better than nothing—you can still be effective.”

Diocesan priests were even more careful. Rev. Stephen C. von Fauer in rural Vermont suffered from anxiety. He questioned his desire to be more pastoral with gays and lesbians in his parish because “needless to say that as far as the hierarchy is concerned (in this diocese) a priest’s involvement with this issue would mean almost the loss of the job, or some disciplinary measure,” wrote the nervous priest. “Most of us clergy-men do not talk about it, but do what we can to reach ‘all the people.’” Von Fauer signed his letter apprehensively in suspense that it did not make it into the “hands of any Inquisitor.” Abbot Edward McCorkell, OCSC also worried about a priest in his diocese who seemed “to be a kind of ‘Grand Inquisitor’” when he wrote Nugent in October 1979. The mole informed Bishop Thomas J. Welsh of Arlington, Virginia, that McCorkell has singed the CCGCR statement and in turn Bishop Welsh confronted McCorkell “since NWM [was] not duly authorized.” In an attempt to alleviate the situation, McCorkell sent Bishop Welsh a copy of the CCGCR statement assuming he would approve.
Approval was not granted. Bishop Welsh advised the abbot to confer with Father James Hickey regarding his assessment of NWM. McCorkell did not follow through with the directive because of reservations about Hickey’s stern, conservative reputation. At the time of McCorkell’s writing, James Hickey was not yet the official archbishop of the Washington, D.C. archdiocese, but instead the Bishop of Cleveland, Ohio, from 1974-1980. His interest in Gramick and Nugent’s ministry developed before his arrival in the nation’s capital. Gramick and Nugent had to tiptoé around Hickey's reputation and his allies early into NWM existence. Supporting the CCGCR was a bold expression of faith, but not so radical that McCorkell expected outright condemnation by his bishop. “Of course, as Cistercian monks, we need to keep in the background in this, as in any other issues of peace, justice, etc,” reminded McCorkell. “However, once in a while, we can make a statement or at least a sign a statement on behalf of basic human rights. Merton certainly did that. We, like him, can expect misinterpretation and misunderstanding.”

Misinterpretations, misunderstandings, and frequent inquisitions pervaded the work of Gramick and Nugent, and they shared the most long-standing tense relationship with the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., even though not far away the Baltimore archdiocese—a seat of expressive conciliar theology and action—which had been an anchor of support for NWM. If NWM had friends in Baltimore, a short distance away Msgr. John F. Donoghue, the Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Washington, made it clear that NWM and the Quixote Center were “in no way affiliated with the Archdiocese nor [were] their publications approved.” He emphasized the point when he sent a memo to all U.S. bishops and leaders of men and women’s religious communities discrediting NWM.9 A tense relationship between NWM and the Washington archdiocese, then under the leadership of Cardinal William Wakefield Baum, appeared practically from the beginning of NWM. Nugent’s faculties expired when he worked in Baltimore during 1979 and his request for renewal in Washington, D.C. was denied (although he still had faculties in Baltimore).10 Church authorities also disapproved of Gramick’s 1978 National Institute of Health grant investigating the lives of lesbian women but were more disturbed by the private retreat for lesbian women religious the next year. In efforts to counteract the Archdiocese of Washington’s memo to all U.S. bishops regarding NWM, Gramick and Nugent released their own letter to bishops and religious superiors outlining their ministerial goals and objectives. By the mid-1980s a thick dossier detailing NWM publications,
programs, and activities had piled up in the offices of the Washington, D.C. archdiocese and in Rome.

James Hickey became the Archbishop of Washington D.C. in 1980 and refused meet with Gramick and Nugent despite repeated requests by the two to explain their ministry. While Hickey hoped the presence of NWM would diminish in his diocese, Gramick and Nugent were busy planning the First National Symposium scheduled for November 1981, and the publicity surrounding the symposium crossed the archbishop’s desk. The archbishop’s secretary summoned the pair to meet with Hickey a few weeks before the event. A bit naïve, Gramick and Nugent arrived alone anticipating a productive dialogue about their ministry, publications, and workshops only to meet John R. Connery, SJ, a moral theologian, Msgr. John Donoghue, and Archbishop Hickey with a detailed agenda. “At the time,” reflected Nugent and Gramick in *Building Bridges*, “we were not politically seasoned enough to realize that the procedure put us at a disadvantage from the outset.”11 The hoped-for dialogue was not a dialogue at all when soon after the meeting Hickey expressed his distrust of NWM with bishops across the country. He urged them and religious communities not to participate in the First National Symposium on Homosexuality in 1981 because NWM’s teachings on homosexuality, specifically sexual acts, were unclear to him. Despite their efforts at explanations, Hickey never garnered his support or approved of their symposiums or publications because he found the position of NWM “ambiguous and unclear.”12 In fact, he took deliberate action to cease their work.13

Ann Therese Syron of St. Margaret of Scotland Parish in St. Clair Shores, Michigan, wrote to NWM at the start of 1985 explaining that she asked the parish to donate to NWM, but was told “no” by the pastor “because he had respect for Archbishop Hickey’s possible objection to it,” and her priest wanted to know why Hickey, “‘campaigned to impede’ this ministry.” The confused Sr. Syron wanted to know where her pastor’s concerns and questions were coming from. Bro. Rick Garcia at the NWM office responded to Syron with a short answer explaining Hickey’s displeasure with NWM’s willingness to present a variety of theological opinions regarding Catholic sexual ethics. “In some cases these [moral] theologians dissent from the church position on the immorality of all homosexual expression under any and all circumstances; some theologians feel that for some people, in some cases, some forms of same sex behavior can be a good moral choice.”14 In order to prevent dissent from church teaching and in fulfilling his “role as Archbishop and principle teacher of the faith” in the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.,
Hickey insisted that lay people should not be exposed to complex theological opinion. He feared the faithful could be easily led astray and official church teaching jeopardized.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Reading Between the Lines or Issues of (Mis)Perception?}

Hickey’s objection to NWM became difficult to ignore. Br. Adrian Gaudin, SC, Superintendent of the Catholic Schools in the diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana, agreed to sponsor a NWM workshop on December 9, 1983. He secured the meeting space at his school only to later realize his facilities would not meet their small group needs, but he vowed to keep looking for a suitable space.\textsuperscript{16} The brother worried about the about the publicity surrounding the anticipated workshop. “Jeannine, you said that you would be doing some publicity,” wrote a nervous Gaudin in a letter dated several months before the scheduled workshop. “I am wondering if you would want me to assist in this area. I would be more than happy to do so.” The brother wanted to make sure Gramick and Nugent were “aware of the fact that Louisiana is rather conservative.” Gaudin qualified, “In the Bayou area of Louisiana–which is where we are–is even more conservative. Therefore, I am wondering if it is necessary to work through the Bishop for this type of workshop…It is certainly not a problem with me, but I am wondering about some other people.”\textsuperscript{17} Gaudin’s “working through the Bishop” strategy did not get very far when the Most Reverend Warren L. Boudreaux at once cancelled the workshop.

In a November letter explaining the nullification to Nugent, Gaudin surmised that the Bishop felt “very guilty at having cancelled the workshop” because he offered to meet with Gramick and Nugent to discuss their ministry, theology, and workshop as “a way of salving his conscience.” Gaudin described Bishop Boudreaux as a kind, tolerant leader and “an open man.” “I think that you will find him very receptive to what you have to offer,” observed Gaudin. “He further told me that he hoped you would impress him in your description of your workshop. If he found this description to be satisfactory, then he said that he would invite you back to the Diocese to give this workshop. He said the invitation would be ‘official,’ and that would mean the Diocese would pay for all of your expenses.”\textsuperscript{18}

Gaudin remained positive about the possibility of dialogue and “so very much thrilled with the education” that he thought Gramick and Nugent provide for Bishop Boudreaux. Polite dialogue commenced to be an option after the bishop learned that the local paper ran a notice about the anticipated NWM workshop. In a memo to “Brother Priests of the Houma-Thibodaux diocese” dated Nov. 15, 1983, Boudreaux furiously wrote, “I’m obliged to point out to you that
this announcement has appeared in spite of the fact that I have contacted the New Ways Ministries to tell them that the Diocese could not and would not sponsor, endorse, or support these workshops.” Boudreaux withdrew NWM’s invitation after making a “consultation with Archbishop Hickey where the Ministries started and three other Bishops knowledgeable about the group.” Boudreaux expounded, “Though they have said it in different ways, each Bishop assured me that though the group claims to repeat the official teaching of the Church on the immorality of homosexuality, that nevertheless, the equivocation remains very vague and seems to leave open the question to the effect that the Church will one day and must one day change a sand on the question.” As an official teacher of the church, the bishop conveyed, “We cannot vacillate on this important matter with any group that does not clearly support the official teaching of the Church.” He commissioned, “To minister to those in this situation is, of course, praiseworthy and good! But to approve the actions as morally acceptable is contrary to the teaching of the Church and we can in no way support it.” Boudreaux enclosed Hickey’s letter regarding NWM to U.S. bishops and acknowledged that Hickey had phoned that week to reiterate and confirm his disapproval of NWM. Hickey literally tracked NWM workshops, calling ahead to deter bishops and intervening in their work outside of his purview. Boudreaux’s letter to the priests suggests that he had no choice but to cancel the workshop, but by disclosing the rational behind the cancellation, he implied that Hickey dictated the decision.

Bishop Boudreaux composed a November 23, 1983, letter to Bro. Adrian Gaudin who was obviously distressed with the bishop’s change of heart and specious memo. The bishop assured the brother that perhaps his memo could be considered “priest talk.” In other words, “It would be as though I had said to them something regarding ‘the official teachings of the Church on the immorality of war of the immorality of anger,’” explained the bishop. “They [the priests] would understand that the Church does not consider all wars immoral, nor all anger immoral, but certain conditions would make it immoral. I’m quite sure that they will understand my statement in t[h]e like manner.” The bishop was confident his priests could read between the lines: while he did not personally see reasons for disapproving of NWM, more senior ecclesiastical authorities did. Boudreaux repeated his regret at having canceled the retreat. “I would not have done so,” promised the bishop, “had those involved not publicly announced the workshop anyway and sought reservations in the daily paper.” He justified the cancellation and resulting memo on his responsibilities as a bishop and “to avoid heaven knows how many phone calls.”
Boudreaux’s anxiety over canceling the workshop was evident, and he was so disturbed with a “heavy heart” and “sincere regret,” that he sought Bishop Walter Sullivan’s advice. Sullivan, the bishop of the Richmond, Virginia diocese, told his friend that after writing an introduction for Nugent’s book *A Challenge to Love: Gay and Lesbian Catholics in the Church*, he had to withdraw his published approval because of disapproval from Cardinal Ratzinger. Sullivan advised Boudreaux that he made a prudent decision in order to avoid ecclesiastical intervention.21

Boudreaux did meet with Gramick and Nugent in December 1983 in order to clarify his “own mind and why there is opposition to them and what they can do to remove it.” Nugent wrote a thank you note to Boudreaux for the meeting, grateful for his honesty and personal nature of their discussion believing that it “helped greatly in clearing some of the air surrounding our ministry and our proposed workshop.” Publicity was an issue for Boudreaux, and Nugent reassured him that press release for the proposed workshop in the diocese was distributed at such an early date that they did not deliberately print the advertisement after the workshop was canceled. Nugent also enclosed a recent letter NWM had “from Bishop Sullivan indicating that he has indeed not withdrawn his support” (albeit now more private support) despite the controversy surrounding Sullivan’s introduction to Nugent’s book.22

Sullivan’s confidential advice for Boudreaux could seem antithetical and disingenuous given his long-time support of NWM and the gay and lesbian ministry in his Richmond diocese, but his position as a bishop makes his public and private affirmation complicated. In the “Acknowledgments” section of *A Challenge to Love*, Nugent thanks Sullivan, “a man who always speaks honestly, courageously, and humbly from his heart,” for his direction in leading the “Spirit-filled,” “faith and vitality” of the Richmond diocese.23 Yet Sullivan also faced ecclesiastical pressure at the highest levels for his introduction to Nugent’s book. As recounted by Nugent in Paul Collins’ *The Modern Inquisition*, supposedly Sullivan traveled to Rome for a meeting shortly after the publication of Nugent’s book, and he visited Cardinal Ratzinger, the prefect or administrative head for the Vatican’s Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). The CDF, a department within the Vatican historically emerging from the trajectory of inquisition offices, is responsible for examining cases regarding Catholic orthodoxy, and the CDF, an important office in the bureaucracy of the Roman curia, is interested in doctrine and morals throughout the Catholic world, including the writings and opinions of laity, religious,
clergy, and theologians. In the 1980s the administrative secretary of the CDF was Italian Archbishop Alberto Bovone and chaired by German Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. When Sullivan visited Ratzinger in the early 1980s, he saw *A Challenge to Love* sitting on the prefect’s desk, and the cardinal insisted Sullivan remove his name from the cover of the book, inferring that Sullivan’s magisterial authority as a defender of church teaching validated the text within. Interestingly, Sullivan was not pressured to recant or remove the introduction. Instead, the CDF implored Nugent’s Salvatorian Provincial Barry Griffin to intervene and stop the printing of Nugent’s *A Challenge to Love*, an edited volume containing chapters from Catholic theologians, ethicists, pastors, and gay and lesbian Catholics. While some church leaders (including those that contributed) regarded the volume as an open, balanced, and respectable avenue to initiate further discussion, some rescinded endorsements after receiving ecclesiastical displeasure.

As authoritative public figures bishops provided legitimacy for NWM, but as the incident with Sullivan demonstrates, public and even private self-censure was safer. If any publicity, including negative press, was productive for NWM, church leaders hoped to avoid every measure of attention unless it was carefully calculated. For instance, Father John R. Farnell in San Francisco mentioned to Nugent that during an “Issues in Private School Administration” class at the University of San Francisco, Gerald Coleman, SS of Saint Patrick Seminary—to Farnell’s delight—recommended *A Challenge to Love* and the work of NWM. In a letter to *A Challenge to Love* contributors, Nugent then mentioned Coleman’s affirmation. Coleman learned that his name had been used in conjunction with the controversial book and ministry and wrote Nugent denying ever speaking publicly on the topic. After consulting Nugent an angry John Farnell wrote Coleman on in November 1983 accusing otherwise, distinctly remembering the NWM reference because it caught him by surprise. Farnell concluded his confrontational letter to Coleman, “I heard what I heard, Father,” and your secret is safe with me.” In response, Coleman did acknowledge that he was “fully aware" that he "spoke favorably to a general audience…about the text.” Qualifying his admittance, he stated, “If I had been challenged or in another context asked for a professional opinion, I would nuance my generally favorably opinion…” While the entire incident might have been a misunderstanding, or in Nugent’s words, a “case of the proverbial mountain from the molehill”; nonetheless, from NWM perspective, not only were private, semi-confidential NWM documents being shared without
permission, but the case highlighted major concerns over transparency and opacity or official and unofficial endorsements.  

Several European colleagues of Gramick and Nugent could not comprehend why American women religious and some priests were insistently conspicuous about their controversial, unique work. Gramick and Nugent’s European friends determined their ministries (holding mass for gay and lesbian Italians for example) were most effective when done covertly or without drawing public attention. In the late 1970s on a visit to Rome Nugent met with his Polish superior general Gerard Rogowski to explain his work with NWM, and he recalled the generalate as “very supportive.” Yet the publicity was a bit much for Rogowski and he asked why Nugent could not continue his gay and lesbian ministry in a more clandestine manner. On another occasion, a monsignor friend of Gramick’s who was also a reporter in Rome confided his opinion: Americans always had to make “big speeches,” in other words, purposely expose their work, or worse, air their dirty laundry. He wondered why she could not just continue doing ministry without writing books and articles or making headlines in the newspapers.

Not only was it difficult for Gramick and Nugent to repress both salutary and demeaning notoriety, but they also believed their workshops and writings were orthodox and provided a needed, open ministry. The coming out process was an essential tenant of the gay and lesbian liberation movement, and Gramick and Nugent imagined themselves sharing a piece of the process as they fashioned their own coming out narrative, voice, and visibility as a Catholic gay and lesbian ministry. Albeit some level of self-censure did take place particularly when publicly discussing sexual behavior, sexual orientation, and religious life, or when respecting confidentiality in a pastoral counseling session. The “do what you have to, but avoid drawing attention” mentality permeated the Catholic culture in which Gramick and Nugent negotiated public and private boundaries.

Sister Janet Mock, Superior General Sisters of St. Joseph in Pittsburgh, met with the bishop Anthony J. Bevilacqua at the beginning of August 1984 to discuss a NWM workshop for women religious in September. But Bevilacqua informed Sr. Mock later in the month about his unwillingness to sponsor a NWM workshop. “As official teacher in the Diocese of Pittsburgh on matters of faith and morals, I need to express my concern about the posture of NWM on the morality of homosexual acts,” observed Bevilacqua. Hickey’s “ambiguous and unclear” accusation had reached the Pittsburgh bishop, and like Bishop Boudreaux, he referred to
Hickey’s October 26, 1981, warning to U.S. bishops about his displeasure with NWM. Bevilacqua wanted proof that if NWM was “questioned on the morality of homosexual acts,” Gramick and Nugent would “clearly present the magisterial teaching of the Church as the sole, authentic position and that it will not, also, give as viable options theological opinions that deviate from the magisterium.” Bevilacqua was willing to grant permission for the workshop if his apprehension, doubt, and concerns about NWM’s accused ambiguity could be dispelled. Gramick and Nugent had to provide him with proof of the “written assurance in support of the magisterium of the Church.” Perhaps in an act of reconciliation, Bevilacqua signed his letter, “Whether or not we agree on a particular issue, it is always essential that we continue to trust each other, and consult with each other on matters of common concern.”

Sr. Mock informed Gramick of her discussion with the bishop and requested a written statement from NWM, assuring Gramick that she wanted to support the School Sister in any way she could. “I know the whole stand you have taken has cost you a great deal,” consoled Sr. Mock. “However, I am convinced that good can come of it in the long run—and will.”

From NWM’s perspective, more dioceses needed to “take a stand” and address homosexuality by establishing a gay ministry similar to their own or at least host a workshop. But such work depended on sympathetic bishops or more likely stealthy religious outside the immediate purview of the chancellery. How were dioceses to implement this trend? “I don’t know of any dioceses where the impetus has come directly from the bishop,” commented Nugent in a 1983 interview. “The bishops have always been prodded, cajoled, confronted, or educated into doing something about it,” usually by senate of priests or lay-organized movement like Dignity. But by fall 1984, Gramick and Nugent were increasingly concerned that ecclesiastical authorities were stomping on grass roots efforts. Hickey pressured Gramick and Nugent’s congregational leaders for over a year demanding NWM leave the Washington, D.C. vicinity. Salvatorian leaders decided it would be best if Nugent removed himself from the NWM offices for a cooling off period from ecclesiastical demands. Gramick’s superiors stalled, but eventually made the same decision. Hickey believed that if there were no co-directors, NWM would cease to exist.

Ambivalent or Audacious?

Hickey’s foremost accusation chastised Gramick and Nugent for presenting “the same level opinions of others who” did not support his traditional, prohibitionist stance of church
teachings on human sexuality. “The teaching of the Catholic Church should be presented clearly and unambiguously as a basis of the formation of conscience,” stated Archbishop Hickey. Essentially Hickey and NWM’s directors held two distinct notions on the nature of authority and dissent. Nugent viewed Archbishop Hickey’s actions as “a basic abuse of authoritarian power.” Gramick agreed and reassured readers that she was not, despite pressure, leaving the ministry. “I don’t think the Spirit works from an authoritarian way and so I don’t interpret his [Archbishop Hickey’s] view as the authentic working of the spirit.” On several occasions Hickey restated John Paul II’s mandate that the bishops must “more effectively proclaim church teachings on sexuality that American Catholics have increasingly rejected.” Despite disapproval from such church leaders, Gramick and Nugent perceived resistance to their ministry as an indication that their grassroots efforts were persuasive and “really pushing for change.” Attention from the highest levels of the Vatican was a “sign that lesbian and gay concerns [we]re being taken seriously by those in the upper echelon.” Perhaps their ideas were not taken seriously, but seen as a serious threat. Regardless, files on Gramick and Nugent, and in turn information on homosexuality, literally piled upon Vatican desks. In response to Hickey’s pressure, his connections with curial offices (CDF and CRSI), and the attempted censoring of NWM, the New Ways’ Board of Trustees dug in their heels pledging to reorganize and “continue to expand the work of New Ways Ministry,” bringing new meaning to the tension.

Some bishops by their very nature would never allow Gramick or Nugent speak at their dioceses, causing those active or interested in gay and lesbian ministry to be geographically isolated from others. Through NWM, Gramick and Nugent provided a network for isolated ministries, some more secretive than others. Enough bishops quietly supported their work (relieved somebody was doing it) in order for them to continue. Amenable bishops in private audiences with Gramick and Nugent affirmed NWM, but many could not risk overt approbation. They could allow a workshop or symposium in their diocese, and in some rare cases, attend themselves. Others simply ignored Hickey’s interference, acknowledged ecclesiastical politics, or questioned why the archbishop was obsessed with homosexuality. English Catholic priest James Allison demands in Faith Beyond Resentment that clergy choose sides: agree or dissent, but resist the conflicting posture of disagreeing with church teachings but upholding them. Unlike Allison, Gramick and Nugent did not expect bishops and clergy to wage battle lines. They understood public and private boundaries were contested, fluid spaces. Most church leaders
had to work between agreeing and dissenting. For NWM this was a valid step in the processes of change. Certainly Gramick and Nugent considered their work on the edge, even possibly offensive to some, but during their tenure as co-directors of NWM, never did they feel isolated. Instead, they were situated between a series of dialectics. But the year of 1984 was particularly challenging for Gramick and Nugent who longed for approval and recognition from unfriendly church leaders.

William Johnson, a United Church of Christ pastor and leader the Lesbian/Gay Interfaith Alliance, wrote Nugent in August 1984 concerned because he had heard nothing from the group and thus assumed NWM had disbanded. Nugent reassured Johnson that he and Gramick were still in business but planned to relocate to Brooklyn in September in order to continue their ministry publicly independent of NWM. Johnson had reason to worry, because in January 1983 Hickey formally requested that School Sisters of Notre Dame leaders remove Gramick from her NWM assignment. Both School Sister and Salvatorian superiors hoped NWM could avoid Hickey’s control by relocating outside of the capital region, but by 1984 Hickey’s damage was done and no valiant diocese would welcome the group. Additionally, Hickey informed General Superior Mary Margaret Johanning, SSND that relocation would not satisfy the ongoing investigation into NWM by the CRSI. Johanning disclosed her correspondence with Hickey in a February 2, 1984, letter to Gramick. Hickey minced no words to the general superior: NWM had to be dissolved. At this point it seemed that Hickey had exerted insurmountable pressure on Gramick’s congregational leaders. In a letter to friend, confident, and seasoned veteran of controversy, Sr. Margaret Traxler, SSND, an upset Gramick asked for “wisdom and strength” as well as advice about how to respond to Johanning’s deliberations with Hickey.

The School Sisters’ provincial team resisted formally removing Gramick from her ministry, anticipating that Hickey (as in the past) would allow them to handle the matter in a way congregational leaders considered appropriate (i.e. less severe). Gramick wrestled with her own conscience. Should she risk the reputation and community of the School Sisters for her lone ministry? School Sisters never asked Gramick dismiss herself from the community, but on more than one occasion in the midst of mental wrangling, she felt obliged to choose between her religious congregation and NWM. She resolved her internal conflict when she determined such a choice was “unfairly cast.” In retaliation to Hickey’s resolve, Gramick announced to friends in a March 1984 letter that she would not resign. “I choose to remain a School Sister of Notre Dame,
not because of financial security for the future, but because it is my spiritual heritage and because of the love and respect for, and the friendships and bonding with, so many wonderful, God-filled women. I also choose to remain with New Ways Ministry because I believe it is the work of the Spirit to which Go[d] has called me on behalf of justice for a marginated people,” wrote Gramick. Believing that the “Spirit does not call by means of pressure or denominational power,” Gramick still had to respect (perhaps not willfully) the jurisdiction of a local bishop.47

Gramick’s leaders compromised, informing Hickey that they assigned the sister to continue working in gay and lesbian ministry, but outside of Washington D.C.48 “Surely,” wrote a defensive Gramick, “this is a statement of their [SSND leader’s] rejection of Archbishop Hickey’s charges against me and New Ways Ministry.”49 While on leave and formally disassociated from NWM, Gramick and Nugent contracted work through auspices of the Catholic Coalition for Gay Civil Rights, and NWM continued functioning in Washington, D.C. but under the administration of lay volunteers.50 Their work was much the same, but the two took more of a low profile while “under fire.”51 For instance, Gramick and Nugent’s work in Pittsburgh in the fall of 1984 included a seminar titled “Tearing Down the Walls: Listening to Dialogue with Lesbian and Gay Christians” at the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Mercy, but the event was technically sponsored by the Catholic Coalition for Gay Civil Rights. The name change did not deter Bishop Bevilacqua who intervened and sent a letter to Gramick and Nugent prior to the seminar concerning NWM’s supposed “ambivalent posture” on the “morality of homosexuality” (meaning his unease over NWM’s posture on homogenital behavior). Nugent, writing from New York City, firmly observed in his response to Bevilacqua, “That I do not have nor have I ever had an ‘ambivalent posture’ on the morality of homogenital behavior, as you suggest,” and Gramick sent a separate letter from Brooklyn, insisting that she had “always been a loyal daughter of the church.”52 Both Gramick and Nugent recounted a brief history, the subsequent controversy surrounding Hickey’s obsession with their work, and expressed their frustration with Hickey’s _sub rosa_ relentless pursuit. Hickey did not hesitate to make public his accusations about NWM without ever meeting with Gramick and Nugent to discuss their ministry. Gramick denounced the fact that his imputations generated “acceptability, not from its intrinsic truth, but solely from the clerical power base from which it emanates.” More wearisome was the fact that there were no channels for due process or to appeal the archbishop’s
judgments, causing, in Gramick’s words, “grave scandal among large segments of the Catholic community.”

Meanwhile the NWM Board of Trustees sustained operations in the D.C. area in Gramick and Nugent’s absences, and Bro. Rick Garcia, BFCC, a member of the board and staff for NWM wrote the Archdiocese of Washington in October 1984 to again request a meeting with Archbishop Hickey. “We look forward to having the opportunity to dialogue with the Archbishop to explore ways of reconciliation and mutual cooperation,” wrote Garcia, who representing NWM’s board, did not want to abdicate on the idea of Gramick and Nugent returning to D.C. as co-directors of NWM.

Rev. Msgr. Raymond J. Boland responded to Garcia’s request over a month later, denying an audience with Hickey because, “At this time Archbishop Hickey feels that his meeting with the staff and Board of Trustees of the New Ways Ministry would only serve to cover ground in which decision have already been made.”

Boland suggested they contact Father Lorenzo Albacete, Hickey’s spokesperson. Aggravated by the archdiocese’s run-around and Albacete’s continued lack of cooperation and compromise, Gramick, Nugent and the New Ways Board declined a meeting with anyone but Hickey as he stood as the final arbitrator.

While several dioceses throughout the country had formal procedures where individuals or communities could initiate a complaint if they felt they were treated unjustly or unfairly, the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C. had no such procedures. When NWM raised such a point, Boland subverted the issue claiming, “Our Council of Priests is working on a draft of the proposed procedures for due process but, because so many archdiocesan consultative bodies review such drafts, I have no idea when the finished project will be recommended to the Archbishop.”

The Experimental Nature of Dissent

Roman curia censures from 1979-1986 only further divided American Catholics and confused many who were still trying to figure out what being justice-minded, postconciliar Catholic meant. Progressive American Catholics felt resistance to their visions and interpretations of the church in the modern world intensified around 1979, shortly after the installation of Pope John Paul II and during the increasingly social conservative ethos ushering in the Regan era. Along with the Vatican’s investigations into NWM, controversy mounted over the Vatican’s “increased repressive tendencies” and demotions of progressively-minded and often outspoken theologians, bishops, and religious. By this time women religious are highly
aware that “disciplinary measures” happen without due process. Two of the most famous examples exemplify the tensions between women religious following their own moral consciences and hierarchical intervention. Twenty-four sisters (including Jeannine Gramick), two priests, two brothers, and several lay people signed an October 4, 1984, advertisement in the New York Times sponsored by the group Catholics for a Free Choice. The public witness called for wider dialogue among Catholics on abortion. The pejorative reaction from Rome was fierce. Male clerics signed retraction statements, but the various sisters would not retract their statement and faced expulsion from their religious communities and disciplinary action from the CRSI. A frightening period of uncertainty ensued for the sisters. They resisted signing declarations affirming the teaching authority of the church on abortion as the Vatican had demanded, nor were they dismissed from their religious orders. The Vatican was not prepared for the sisters’ collective insubordination.

In a related case during the mid-1980s, Sister Agnes Mary Mansour, RSM was forced by Pope John Paul II to choose between resigning from her position of Social Services director of the state of Michigan or be dismissed from the Sisters of Mercy. While Sr. Mansour personally opposed abortion, the social service agency she served administered public funds that financed abortions for women who could not afford it. Because Mansour could not in good conscience comply with the pope’s mandate, she regretfully requested dispensation from her vows with the Sisters of Mercy. Despite her formal withdrawal, the Sisters of Mercy community considered the Mansour a valid, vital part of the community for the rest of her life.

The debate over the nature of dissent in the American Catholic only became more acute. Gramick and Nugent’s good friend and confidant, moral theologian Rev. Charles E. Curran’s scuffles with the Washington, D.C. archdiocese and the CDF are legendary. Curran, a prolific writer and popular teacher at Catholic University of America, challenged the way Catholics thought about church teaching on contraception and human sexuality. Curran was a moderate voice within the Catholic moral theological tradition, but the issue at stake with the CDF was the nature of dissent. While the CDF began a major investigation into Curran’s writings and teachings in 1979, a Vatican file opened on the theologian as early as 1966. In 1986 the Vatican revoked Curran’s teaching responsibilities despite much protest by students and faculty (the University Board of Trustees made the ruling official in summer 1988). The censure came in the form of a letter addressed to Curran directly from Cardinal Ratzinger who upheld Pope John Paul
II’s effort to “reassert orthodox Catholic teaching and to discipline those who have been found to have strayed.”

When Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle received threats from the ultra-traditionalist group Catholic United for the Faith because of his moral stance on progressive issues, including sexuality, birth control, and peace movements (not to mention his support of NWM and a congenial relationship with Dignity), the CDF examined the situation and Ratzinger assigned Archbishop Hickey an apostolic visitor to Seattle to investigate the west coast bishop. The 1983 investigation resulted in Hunthausen’s diminished authority and administrative capabilities. Critics of the Vatican blamed the curia for “an unwarranted intervention” and feared an increasingly conservative backlash by church leaders. Sister Chauncy Boyle commented to a New York Times reporter about the Hunthausen affair, “We are angry…Since Vatican II, we were attempting to become more collegial. This decision is not very collegial.”

In efforts to protest disciplinary actions against progressive Catholic theologians, priests, and religious, such as Charles Curran, Hans Kung, John McNeill, SJ, among others, the Quixote Center formed an ad-hoc collation with five member organizations (Catholics Act for ERA, New Ways Ministry, Priests for Equality, Quixote Center, and Women’s Ordination Conference) called “Catholic Advocates for Equality” in 1979. The group drafted a statement called “Even the Stones Will Cry Out” for the National Catholic Reporter protesting the “heavy-handedness of the Vatican” and “inquisitorial spirit” causing “the new wave of repression and silencing that threatens to muffle the call of the Spirit and message of Vatican II in our church” marked by the signing of 2,600 individuals and 100 organizations. Signers hoped and prayed that the 1980s would be a time of reinvigorated renewal and change, but these idealized promises met swift, powerful dissent and resentment by traditionalist church leaders. Nonetheless, many religious caught in the throws of change and subsequent authoritarian backlash sympathized with Gramick and Nugent’s ministry. Tenuous relationships with church hierarchy only strengthened their resolve to stay engaged.

Support poured into the NWM offices during Gramick and Nugent’s 1983 and 1984 sabbaticals. Leonard A. Voegtle, FMS of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia, wrote Nugent. “I hope that whatever happens, you’ll find a way to continue to minister to the gay and lesbian community at large,” encouraged Voegtle. “It’s a good time of year [advent] for us all to remember that weakness has its own strength, and that the designs of the lord have their
own way of working themselves out in ways that defy our understanding, even as they at times tax our patience and strain our faith to the breaking point.”68 Gramick and Nugent’s religious communities collected endorsement letters, serving as marks of legitimacy and credentials, to present to the CRSI and investigative committees in hopes of proving their worth in the Catholic community and easing ecclesiastical pressure. Many persons touched by the work of Gramick and Nugent wrote their superiors thanking them for their ministry. Jim Green, a former Society of the Divine World brother and partnered gay man for over fourteen years, wrote Provincial Barry Griffin, SDS in January 1984 admitting, “I find my faith wavering a bit when I consider the need for the letter [of support] regarding New Ways Ministry.” Green was not able to express how much NWM had meant to him, especially since he had received over fifty-five personal letters from NWM over a five-year period. Why would church authorities terminate such a valuable ministry? “When you consider the incredible odds that Fr. Bob Nugent has face from elements within the church itself,” observed Green, “I am saddened that this is often the price for doing the work of the Spirit.”69 Green described himself as once a “self hating full blown alcoholic” who denied his sexual orientation the whole while. He became self destructing in so many ways: hating the church and assuming God hated him for who he was. At the time of writing he was able to reflect on “God’s love despite many hardships” and felt obligated to defend the work of Gramick and Nugent for their years of aiding Catholic gays and lesbians who “suffer so deeply.”70

Barbara Freemyer, RSM of the New Covenant Justice and Peace Center in Omaha, Nebraska, wrote Gramick in the fall of 1983 stating, “I just want to say that I support you and glad that your community will not ask you to leave your ministry or at least I have hope that they didn’t!” The sister added, “I am not going to get into speaking about what I think of Bishops!!” but she affirmed that Gramick and Nugent were “important to the folks who are so oppressed by our Church…Thanks for saying ‘yes’ admist [sic] the growing pain.” Inspired by women’s participation in the church and a growing feminist consciousness, Feemyer extended her activism to gay and lesbian Catholics by organizing a Dignity chapter in Omaha. “We still must walk forward responding to the folks; no matter what events might happen to us” wrote the encouraging sister. “I did want to say thanks for everything you are doing to free the oppressed. May you continue to follow your heart and not human laws.”71 Such prophetic visions were not pragmatic for some religious, especially diocesan priests, who risked loosing their jobs.
Freemyer’s Dignity chapter may have been a much-needed (even encouraged) ministry, but by the early 1980s, priests working with Dignity chapters in conservative dioceses had long faced disciplinary measures by scrutinizing authorities.

Six years prior to Freemyer’s work in Omaha, Paul Morrissey, OSA, a chaplain for Dignity Philadelphia, wrote a confidential letter to the Philadelphia Dignity officers, chaplains, Gramick, and Nugent explaining that the Philadelphia archdiocese requested that Morrissey “1) stop celebrating public mass for Dignity without faculties, and 2) stop being publicly identified with the Dignity movement.” A nervous Morrissey was uncertain about what to do, but he continued to relate to Dignity in a “quiet” way. His options were limited in that he could refute the order and publicly perform masses, acquiesce to the request (but provide private home masses), or leave the Augustinians and the priesthood. The last option deeply troubled Morrissey. “Assist me in seeing how I can graciously leave the priesthood,” pleaded Morrissey. “I don’t want to hate the Church, or cause hatred in others for the Church. I only want to break chains, bring truth, and be headlining—as we serve the Lord and his unfathomable will together.”

While Morrissey wanted to be “headlining” reformer, not every priest could be a radical activist or of Berrigan brother fame. At least labor activist priests shared a popular platform within secular unions. Reform minded Catholic activists concerned with sexuality issues had fewer options, as not all social justice activists were concerned with private and public sexuality issues. However, Fr. Paul Kabat, OMI of Minneapolis, Minnesota, an activist priest who had “the dubious distinction of being fired by five bishops” in his twenty-five years of ministry and could identify with NWM’s tenuous relationship with ecclesiastical authority. Kabat urged Gramick and Nugent to continue their ministry, because “Such confrontations serve to show the artificially tense attitude of the hierarchical structure in its efforts to help control.” Kabat signed his letter warning, “Watch out, Hickey.”

Gramick and Nugent did not wish literal harm or violence inflicted upon Hickey, but on more than one occasion, they did wish he would disappear. NWM accepted Hickey's confrontations would not diminish. The archbishop kept a close watch the pair even while they evaded hierarchical intervention for as long as they could. Gramick and Nugent never underestimated the power of friendships, networking, alliances, and collective power. People within the church’s institutional structure formed layers of protection and at times promoted
NWM, or in Gramick’s words, “hierarchy really worked for me.” Superials, ally Catholic organizations, and sympathetic theologians defended Gramick and Nugent’s work and they also transmitted the work of NWM through various channels. As part of NWM’s educational strategy, Gramick and Nugent collected, and subsequently featured in their publications and workshops, positive writings and statements on gay and lesbian issues from Catholic organizations and leaders. These voices not only demonstrated to gay and lesbian Catholics and their families that the church cared, but also validated a needed mention of homosexuality and highlighted Catholic leaders that were at least aware of the issue—even if their statements provided tangential reference gay and lesbian rights. A sliver of mentioned acknowledgement was better than none.

Official statements from priests’ councils and religious communities could provide little consolation to gay and lesbian Catholics that had experienced rejection and hurt by the church. Gay and lesbian Catholics knew if they looked at official Catholic documents on homosexuality, not only would they interpret mixed messages, but by Mark Jordan’s assessment also recognize “the rhetorical devices of unstable terminology, incoherent principles, and fallacious argument.” Gramick and Nugent acknowledged that the sound bite-like references to homosexual orientation from committees or councils provided only small markers of progress and hope that the church was opening up to the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics. But it was a start and a tangible reference to which to cling. More needed to be done in terms of justice and reconciliation beyond the position statements.

If words could translate into actions, Gramick and Nugent aided the transition from private whispers to public voices, literally setting the tone they prayed would inspire change. For example, the oft-quoted 1976 National Conference of Catholic Bishops’ “To Live in Christ Jesus” document featured a small paragraph on gays and lesbians. The bishops affirmed that gay and lesbian people “like everyone else should not suffer 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.” The inclusion of the statement was not a spontaneous recognition of Catholic gays and lesbians by the bishops. Although it was not proposed by NWM, Gramick did have a role in its appearance through a priest she knew in Baltimore who headed the priest personnel board and was familiar with her work with Dignity in Philadelphia. He wrote up a paragraph about reaching out to gay and lesbian people and gave it to Philip Francis (Frank)
Murphy who was one of the auxiliary bishops in Baltimore at the time. Murphy, a bishop interested in social justice issues and who later served on the National Catholic Conference of Bishop’s Committee for Women in Church and Society, introduced the paragraph about gays and lesbians onto the floor of the bishops’ conference. The inclusion passed and became part of their pastoral letter on moral values. Although it was a minute paragraph, NWM used it “like crazy.”

Gramick and Nugent had a hand in the statement through their work in Baltimore and their entrees into church structure there. They sustained their ministry despite crushing intervention because they clung to these small steps of recognition that could then be built upon. The process was painfully protracted but a scheme to stay connected and accountable with many American church leaders.

Although the United States bishops would address sexuality in the 1991 pamphlet *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*, American bishops did not produce a declaration directly addressing homosexuality until the mid-1990s. It had been over two decades since U.S. bishops had addressed the issue, and Gramick and Nugent felt that American church leadership needed to speak. They wrote the president of the bishop’s conference requesting that the issue of “homosexuality” be considered for discussion. They learned, however, that only bishops could place items on the agenda, so they contacted their friend Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton of Detroit for his help. It must be noted that Gumbleton had a progressive reputation and was in a unique place to take Gramick and Nugent’s private requests public.

Gumbleton had a long history of interest in social justice and served in the progressive Detroit archdiocese. He was forced into gay rights issues when Brian McNaught, a reporter for archdiocesan newspaper *The Michigan Catholic* and member of Dignity/Detroit, staged a seventeen-day hunger fast in 1974 calling attention to the oppression and discrimination of gay Catholics within the church. Bishop Gumbleton and Bishop Joseph L. Imesch ended McNaught’s protest with a letter calling for church leaders to reassess the plight of homosexual Catholics, but Gumbleton’s awareness of homosexuality deepened in the early 1990s during a personal confrontation and acknowledgement of a gay loved-one. He spoke at a NWM symposium in Chicago in 1992, essentially “coming out” in recognition of his gay brother. The bishop exemplified the ministry of NWM: he listened to and cared for his brother, educated himself about gay and lesbian issues, and spoke out. Gumbleton attended the symposium with
two speeches in hand: 1) the standard planned and safe bishop speech and 2) his personal experience recognizing his own homophobia and expressing his desire to reconcile his relationship with his brother. Gumbleton opted for the second speech, even though he worried about damaging his esteem as a bishop and how people would handle his honesty.  

Collaborating with Gumbleton, Gramick and Nugent produced a letter for the bishop’s conference and sought nearly a dozen other bishops to co-sign the letter. The team then strategized with Bishop William A. Hughes of Covington, Kentucky, about which committee would be most politically receptive to their proposed letter, eventually deciding that the Committee on Marriage and Family Life chaired by Cardinal Bernardin would be the most receptive avenue for possible inclusion. Their timing was not ideal as Bernardin was leaving office in 1993, but he passed on the letter with the recommendation to take it up. Although Always our Children (1997) took nearly five years to see the light of day and was produced as a pastoral letter to parents—less threatening than a pastoral letter to gay and lesbian people—it made it, and was in Gramick and Nugent’s eyes, a much need recognition. Always our Children became an invaluable resource for Catholic diocesan lesbian and gay ministries throughout the 1990s into the 21st century.  

For Gramick and Nugent, “Catholic teaching” incorporated a variety of disparate authoritative voices, but was most resonant when it harmonized with the experiences and voices of the faithful. Gramick and Nugent's inclusion of gays and lesbians as "the people of God" provided new meaning to what constituted "church." They contributed to what Catholic historian Jay Dolan elucidates happened to Catholic culture in the last three decades of the 20th century: “For the first time in modern history, Catholics no longer agreed on an answer to the question of what it meant to be Catholic.”  

The identity crisis is even more complicated when bishops could agree on what it meant to be Catholic when they publicly upheld the magisterial teaching of the church, but nuanced what it meant to be Catholic behind closed doors. Gramick and Nugent understood this negotiation not only at the ecclesiastical level but also within religious communities and geographical regions of the country. Supporters of NWM from all levels of the church could unrestrictedly agree that pledging to help end the injustice of homophobia and discrimination was a safe and worthy social justice cause. The issue of homosexuality became more controversial when the more ambiguous area of the morality of sexual acts arose in pastoral care
situations. If no one could agree on what being a Catholic meant, Gramick and Nugent took advantage of the shared interstitial space produced while negotiating transparency and opacity.

In a twist of meaning-making, Gramick and Nugent molded their identities by claiming no specific static Catholic or sexual identities. Not fully insiders nor fully outsiders within official Catholic structure, they cultivated a life shared by the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics. They formed coalitions and organized protests but Gramick and Nugent also had a duty to maintain accountability to their religious tradition, and more pragmatically to their religious superiors. Like gays and lesbians who were honest with themselves and God, but rejected by society, Gramick and Nugent embraced their vulnerability negotiated between cultivating love and suffering from being hated by parts of their own Catholic family. From a religious worldview, they were living the paschal drama—the mystery of death and resurrection in the redemptive Christian tenant of God relating to human beings through God becoming man in the form of Jesus Christ. They suffered at the hands of persecutors but also attempted to imitate Jesus’ life and ministry with their own prophetic message.

To begin to piece together a narrative about same-sex love and the church, one needs to understand how the extensive theme of insiders and outsiders characterizes much of postconciliar history. For this particular community of Catholics “to be Catholic” meant to negotiate private and public boundaries. Ministering carefully and quietly with subterfuge became synonymous with measured success and progress within institutional church structure. However, Catholics like Gramick and Nugent also worked to challenge the silence surrounding the taboo topic of human sexuality and give voice to historically oppressed voiceless. More often than not, many Catholics in the final decades of the 20th century Catholic culture found themselves on the threshold of the closet—not fully out in the open, but not hidden in a dark corner either.
If many out gay and lesbian Catholics articulate their relationship to the church as a love-hate relationship, can reconciliation be a possibility? Dugan McGinley recently made such a point when he compiled writings by gay Catholics and provided an analysis of the love-hate theme in his *Acts of Faith Acts of Love*. The love-hate language is so prevalent in personal narratives and essays, that one can easily overlook a familiar theme: the church has caused guilt, self-hatred, and torment for many individuals but also provided a spiritual home, tradition, culture, vision for life, and occasionally a vocation. Essayists express reassurance in the sacramental nature of the tradition, finding comfort in the shared rituals and unique cultural identity associated with growing up Catholic. The writings of gay and lesbian Catholics who remain practicing their faiths—even those who have vacated the church—often recount a type of coming-out and conversion narrative in which a burgeoning sexual and spiritual awareness are experienced simultaneously. The narrative climaxes at the point when the narrator is able to overcome internal self-hatred manifested in previous attempts to reconcile a religious and sexual identity. The long-time editor of the *National Catholic Reporter*, Thomas Fox, summarizes the experienced duplicity in *Sexuality and Catholicism*, “Many gays and lesbians, loathing their church’s homophobic role in history, still find themselves looking to it for spiritual guidance and meaning.”

The voices of New Ways Ministry, their supporters, and gay and lesbian Catholics tell of a common wound caused by the church’s official teachings and demonstrated exclusion at the same time the stories convey a desire to maintain contact with the church that raised them and nurtured their spirituality. Gramick and Nugent’s ministry negotiated between sentiments of love and hate. Solidarity through suffering is nothing novel to Catholic theology, but woundedness takes on a different meaning when experienced by gay and lesbian Catholics attempting to reconcile sexual and religious identities. Many gay and lesbian Catholics express reconciliation with God as they determine themselves spiritually secure. However, they are frustrated that the institution and church hierarchy rejects them. In some ways the shared experiences of being rejected by a religious tradition is what brings people together into a
community such as Dignity. Gramick and Nugent linked alienation, oppression, and their own exclusion by some church leaders to a wider church community bound by a ministry to heal and do justice. As a sister and a priest, Gramick and Nugent sought to exemplify the life of Jesus. Gramick explained that she understands Jesus as the “wounded healer and reconciler, who experienced alienation and rejection, but who continually practiced and preached non-violence and love of one’s enemies.” He is her model and friend.\(^7\)

**Wounded: The Love/Hate Relationship**

If gay Catholics had a love-hate relationship with the church, Gramick and Nugent had a mission to repair the rapport. They hoped gay and lesbian Catholics would rekindle a spiritual home in Catholicism and in turn the church understand and love them with full acceptance. Although from 1972 to 1986 there was a great deal of ferment over homosexuality, the stir resulted from the institutional church’s mixed messages about same-sex love—occasionally acknowledging sexual orientation, but most often ignoring the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics.\(^8\) NWM existed in the intersections between the magisterium and gay Catholics or between moral and pastoral teachings. Their ministry existed to “build bridges” between the disparate voices in the church, a ministry that required compromise and negotiation. But sometimes the chasm between contradictory Catholic attitudes seemed impassible.

The Vatican’s Sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith’s 1975 document, *Persona Humana*, or *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*, did attempt to incorporate an emphasis on human dignity into the church’s response to homosexual Catholics. The document authors determined sexual orientation (including homosexual orientation) to be an innate, un-chosen part of the human person at the same time the authors bifurcated sexual orientation from behavior. The declaration stated, “the Christian community should provide them [homosexual persons] a special degree of pastoral understanding and care.”\(^9\) Many Catholics felt the recognition of homosexual orientations was a positive step towards acknowledging gay and lesbian persons, especially since the admission came from the highest levels of the Vatican. Pastoral ministries focused on celebrating the human worth of all types of individuals while avoiding discussion, moral warnings, and debates about sexual activity.\(^10\) Although there are theoretical and practical implications for ignoring sexual ethics, NWM avoided openly critiquing the orientation/behavior divide. Gramick and Nugent did, however, recognize that the documents like *Persona Humana*, which asserted the orientation/behavior
distinction, did at least prove “some what helpful in clarifying some of the complexities involved in any rational discussion of homosexuality.” Other Catholics were more outspoken and challenged traditional sexual ethics. Revisionist theologians like John McNeill, SJ were able to make some headway in opening up the discussion of homosexuality in the mid-1970s. Rome even granted an _imprimi potest_ (official approval of printing) in 1976 to the Jesuit’s *The Church and the Homosexual*, a text that challenged the magisterial teaching on the morality of same-sex love and expression. The progress though was short-lived as the _imprimi potest_ was removed and McNeill silenced on the topic two years later.

Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, gay and lesbian Catholics were attending NWM workshops, reading more available sources on the subject, especially Yale historian John Boswell’s, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, participating in Dignity masses, and agreeing with the findings in the Task Force on Gay/Lesbian Issues of the Commission on Social Justice at the Archdiocese of San Francisco’s report *Homosexuality and Social Justice*. The task force recommended the church not only address the problem of violence against gays, but also radically change its understandings and attitudes regarding sexual ethics by taking into consideration personal experiences of gay sexuality. Despite what seemed to be improved recognition of Catholic gay and lesbian identities (at least sexual orientation), discrimination and silence nevertheless defined many gay and lesbian Catholic lives if individuals struggled to maintain an ancestral home in the church. Interference by the Vatican to suppress and silence progressive theologians and writers amplified, and the odds for remaining a practicing Catholic seemed insurmountable. For more than a decade, Catholic gay and lesbian ministries worked to initiate dialogue at all levels of church structure. Workshops, newsletters, and retreats mobilized grass roots efforts as awareness about the issue came not only from women religious, priest’s councils, and some bishops, but also from the Vatican’s interest (albeit negative curiosity) in NWM’s work.

Extending their ministry beyond Catholic networks and partnerships, Gramick and Nugent represented NWM in several ecumenical services and retreats for gay and lesbian Christians. Other denominations also worked to lessen gay and lesbians “sense of injury” by the church and subsequent aversion to organized religion. Interfaith services for Christian gays and lesbians were sources of “significance for many” people who had ideal aspirations for remaining a part of their tradition. As one spokesperson put it, he attended a retreat for gay and lesbian
Christians with “Hope to transform condemnation to compassion.  Hope to transform fear to friendship.”  The stumbling block to these aspirations was what Catholic, gay activist Brian McNaught described as “Churchphobia.”  Gramick and Nugent were keenly aware of the rejection suffered by gay and lesbian Catholics, and McNaught worked closely with NWM to convey these painful experiences to the wider Catholic community.  An outspoken activist, Dignity president, dynamic speaker, and writer, McNaught exemplified the connection between religion and gay and lesbian activism. He once reminded readers of the Washington Blade that some of the gay and lesbian movement’s “strongest advocates” were from religious backgrounds, such as Virginia Apuzzo, former chair of the National Gay Task Force, and Jean O’Leary of National Gay Rights Advocates who were both former Roman Catholic nuns.  McNaught’s examples suggested a Catholic identity informs an activist identity and perhaps visa-versa, but McNaught’s models did not provide much hope for reformers to stay within the church or strategies for negotiating what many felt were competing duel identities: lesbian and Catholic. In fact, McNaught struggled to reconcile his own spirituality and sexuality, and he would later clash with Nugent over protest reform ideologies when McNaught was more outspoken and willing to criticize church leaders. NWM did not give up hope for reform from within, even if their ministry was measured, cautious, and exceedingly conservative for some activists.

The momentum of Catholics challenging the church’s homophobic attitudes came to an abrupt halt on October 31, 1986, with release of the Vatican’s Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons,” signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and Archbishop Alberto Bovone. The so-called “Ratzinger Letter” described homosexual orientation as an “objectively disordered” condition “ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil” at the same time it asserted pastoral care was needed, stating, “the particular inclination of the homosexual is not a sin.” With a few words the contested moral space between orientation and behavior diminished, wedging out what remnants of tolerance and inclusiveness could be salvaged from an already fragile balance. Although most gay and lesbian Catholics considered the bifurcation fabricated and artificial, at least they were not branded as “evil” in prior documents. Now, not only was same-sex love disordered, but so was one’s personhood.
Conservative and traditionalist church leaders accused Gramick and Nugent of propagating ambiguous church teachings, when in fact Gramick and Nugent restated the illogic already expressed in church teachings. How was one to reconcile a recognized intrinsic, natural sexual orientation in 1975 with church teaching also determining that intrinsic homosexual orientation was disordered by 1986? The teaching authorities of the church informed gay and lesbian Catholics that they respected, even loved, them at the same time they were condemned. The much-maligned letter corresponded with the AIDS outbreak and only complicated and reinforced the dichotomy for suffering AIDS patients. Reactions to the letter were fierce: the press, Dignity, and the National Collation of American Nuns (NCAN) largely decried the letter as homophobic—only validating what many already thought to be a hateful, ignorant, and authoritarian church. The letter had specific ramifications for Dignity chapters across the country as it specifically forbade groups who do not agree with church teaching (homosexuality is intrinsically evil) to meet on church property, including the facilities of Catholic schools and colleges. With many Catholics disgusted and angry at a church that failed to consider the experiences of gays and lesbians, Cardinal Ratzinger was demonized as the poster boy for homophobia and cold, out of touch leaders.

Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin

While violent action is usually quite easy to identify, emotion, rhetoric, and attitude are notoriously difficult to pin down. Sentiments and beliefs are often hidden to advance the ultimate purposes of believers. One statement that captures this complex brand of religious rhetoric is “love the sinner, hate the sin,” especially when it is applied to gays and lesbians. This persistent message has become a trademark of religious conservatives in America, and an oft-cited phrase in letters, complaints, and critiques directed to Gramick and Nugent. It is a message heard from pulpits and presented in such contexts as a valid religious ideology and moral position to guide believers. The phrase is especially troublesome, because it is on the one hand extremely simple and direct. Telling Christians to love the other even if she is a sinner and to hate the sin might be viewed as admirable, even desirable. On the other hand, the phrase contains some important and controversial Christian theological principles, such as the duty to love the neighbor and the essential sinfulness of all humans. It is at this intersection of love and hate where religious meaning hinges and is in reality not so black and white.
Gramick and Nugent considered the orientation-behavior disconnection as self-depreciating and damaging at the same time they manipulated the dichotomy as a way to initiate critiques of Catholic sexual ethics. Otherwise, there would have been no place to start. Separating orientation from behavior was not a pastoral message they endorsed, nor counseled (with the exception of celibate religious), but pragmatically, the Catholic teaching was the only sexual ethic available. In the meantime they continued in their ministry influencing opinions and inspiring change through initiating dialogue, sharing the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics in workshops, and concentrating on human and civil rights. They hoped the magisterium would be shamed into taking gay and lesbian experiences of oppression and discrimination seriously. Perhaps with their efforts, church officials could embrace a more complicated understanding of sexual ethics. A pastoral counseling scenario involving a diocesan priest and a gay parishioner could illicit rejection and condemnation when the priest couched sexuality in language of sin and reduced the complex situation to “love the sinner but hate the sin.” On the other hand, pastoral responses could also be positive, affirming, and hopeful. It is no surprise that sensitive pastoral approaches clashed with Vatican moral declarations on several levels.

If gay and lesbian Catholics could be attracted to, but also repulsed by the church, opponents of NWM professed to love the church, but hate how the postconciliar church was behaving by becoming more pluralistic, socially engaged, and politically savvy. For detractors NWM represented church renewal gone astray. Progressive Catholics recognized sin in social problems and communal language rather than personal moral behavior, and NWM extended social sin to discriminating against gays and lesbians. In a collaboration of essays by American sisters, Gramick observed, “This long overdue ministry [NWM] to a class considered pariahs or contemporary Samaritans is an essential ingredient in the reparation for the church’s social sin against the lesbian and gay community.” But for traditional Catholics upset with the clergy and sisters’ emphases on justice and social activism, personal vice and sin were of greater importance. The concept of sin literally glares in unfavorable correspondence to NWM. On an envelope postmarked from Oakland, California, the sender listed a dozen scribbled bible verses and marked in green ink “God loves the sinner but always hates the SIN.” Just in case the point was misconstrued, the sender boldly underlined the word “SIN” in red ink.
For some traditionalist Catholics and fundamentalist Protestants, homosexuality is condition metaphysically described as an illness. According to this line of reasoning, if a person is spiritually, mentally, and physically healthy, then he is living a moral, righteous life. While homosexuality is not considered a physical, medical illness for all conservative Catholics, some do believe it is a contaminated mental and spiritual condition of human nature, a sinful lifestyle or moral corruption that breeds suffering, anxiety, and possibly physical disease. Conceptualizing homosexuality as an illness like alcoholism makes it easier for Catholics to feel compassion for the sinner and to examine their own moral depravity and anxiety over sin.

In a sense, the love-hate language also highlights issues of opacity and transparency: parents, friends, and ministers could privately demonstrate love and compassion for gay and lesbian persons, but publicly condemn, ignore, and distance themselves from what they considered sinful behavior. Joe R. Monroe from Holdenville, Oklahoma, wrote NWM in 1978 insisting that Gramick and Nugent reread Romans 1: 17-24. “We must love the sinner but hate the sin,” admonished Monroe. He assured Gramick and Nugent that he would not turn away a homosexual from church if they confessed their sin privately to God and worked to transform their lives, nor would he discriminate in jobs or housing because for Monroe sin was private and admittedly none of his business. “But when they brag about their sinfulness openly and become a scandal,” warned Monroe, “then that’s a different ballgame.” In a similar letter signed “M”, the author asked Nugent, “Whatever happened to the good old time confessions, where people confessed their sins privately and as a whole, not singled out in groups. Why all of a sudden are groups demanding rights? Right to what? People can and do anything they want privately, why this public acceptance? These concerned writers denied the personal as political, were fearful of the reforming potential of identity politics, and resented state interference in regulating tolerance. Of course Gramick and Nugent hoped antidiscrimination laws would raise awareness and lessen homophobia, but legalizing tolerance could have the opposite effect—rallying resistance.

Sister Mary Bernard, SFCC in Rigewood, New York, collapsed the fragile private and public distinction when she wrote Gramick and Nugent accusing them of sympathizing with sinners. She claimed that Jesus never sympathized with sinners but that he did “give them an opportunity to repent, to accept a new life of grace.” Sr. Bernard cautioned, “Sin and grace cannot abide together. We must love the sinner (homosexuals and lesbian) but not the sin!”
sister insisted that Gramick and Nugent work to “FREE THEM [gays and lesbians] of this terrible VICE.” She introduced an additional binary category: purity and impurity. Her idea of freedom and liberation was Jesus’ “pure love” (double underlined in the text) and not the “humanistic biblical theology” of which she accused NWM of purporting. Signed “Your sister in the pure Jesus,” Sr. Bernard was not ready to initiate dialogue on the subject as NWM assistant Rick Garcia had proposed in a letter to the distraught sister. Another anonymous letter linked the pleasures of same sex activity with “worship[ing] the orgasm” (i.e. the sin of worshiping false gods). The writer claimed orgasm “re-crucified our Lord”; yet the author insisted he was would not “condemn the homosexual, but pray for his conversion!” In other words, hope for healing rested in accepting God’s love and affirmation of forgiveness while hating and fighting one’s personal sexual sin. These anxious writers appear to be tormented by feared repercussions from sin; perhaps their own wounds were not healed.

The violence of exclusion and damnation for the homosexual is a direct condemnation of the sin, but as evidenced by the letters, the sinner is not so easily disassociated from the behavior. Without repentance the sinner has no hope. Granted the wickedness of the sin is distinguished from the humanity of the sinner in the above examples. Catholics who use the religious language of love and healing to combat the perceived evil of homosexuality confuse the fine line between the two. Even if the agent could be separated from the behavior, this bifurcation inevitably results in internal conflict and implicit violence through abstraction and loss of subjectivity.

Christians’ polarizing rhetoric of loving God and hating the sin first defends the natural/unnatural view of the world and carries a high emotional charge. Their words demonstrate the explicit violent exorcising of evil and painful recognition of emotional wounds. Gramick and Nugent recognized that the seemingly innocuous phrase “love the sinner hate the sin” had the possibility to be misplaced from “the sin” to “the sinner,” diminishing a gray area between the rhetoric and actions of loving and hating. Gramick understood that the official position of the Catholic Church to “love the sinner even if you hate the sin” was neither realistic nor very pastoral. In other words, separating a person’s orientation (and perhaps identity) from behavior was not so realistic, but a rather hurtful assumption. “You shouldn’t lay down conditions for acceptance,” commented Gramick. “The bottom line is human dignity.” Gramick and Nugent never uttered the words, “love the sinner, but hate the sin,” because the denigrating phrase failed to recognize creative expressions of human sexuality and spirituality.
They refused to couch same-sex love in sinful terms and qualified their public pastoral work and civil rights activism by focusing on sexual orientation rather than moral behavior. In fact, they de-sexualized gay and lesbian identities at the same time they wanted to impart sexual love and expression as a complex component of what constitutes a being human.  

The disturbed correspondence directed at NWM challenges Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini’s assertion in *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*. They write, “Love the sinner, hate the sin means that when Christians like Rev. Jerry Falwell or media personalities like Dr. Laura denounce homosexuality, they are not being hateful.” These Protestant spokespersons and Catholics, such as Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum or bishops speaking against gay rights, are taking a moral stand. One could concur with Jakobsen and Pellegrini that “In practice, however, love the sinner, hate the sin allows people to take positions that are punitive toward their fellow citizens, while at the same time experiencing themselves as being not simply ethical, but compassionate and even tolerant of difference.” In their analysis Jakobsen and Pellegrini overlook the rhetoric of religious love and “healing” as a form of religious conflict, at best intolerance, and at worse violence and hatred. Although Jakobsen and Pellegrini recognize the limits of compassionate rhetoric when spoken from the mouths of both Protestant and Catholic figures of the Religious Right, and while a pastoral response to “love the sinner, hate the sin” could be viewed as somewhat more acceptable than blatant condemnation of the person, some conservative Catholics do use language of compassion, love, and tolerance for political agendas that also bolster hatred, or at least allow for the exercise of discursive power in creating ideological wedges. When Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA) says, “I have no problem with homosexuality – I have a problem with homosexual acts,” as Dugan McGinely has pointed out, “he does have a problem with homosexuality – both acts and the people who do them.” Additionally, the hatred oftentimes is hidden and not expressed in the voices of the agents. This is the ambiguous zone where cruelty could be mistaken for love. It was difficult for Gramick and Nugent to deny that when Catholic fathers like Mr. James Doherty who described his eldest son as a “Somodmist” and warned his son that he was “living in sin” facing “severe judgment,” that the father caused anxiety and self-hatred for his son despite the concession of “tough love” and compassion.

At other times the hatred directed towards NWM, gays, and lesbians was unmistakably blatant. A 1982 postcard from Kansas City, Missouri, jolted Gramick and Nugent: “FOUND
Hate mail consistently identified Gramick and Nugent as heretics, accusing the pair of being Catholic charlatans and threatening them with damnation. Most of the “disturbed correspondence” was preoccupied with what writers considered “perverted” and “dirty” sexual acts. Many were irrationally fearful of gay and lesbian persons, but even more frantic in their conceptualizations of same-sex sexual expression, perhaps displacing their own shame onto others. “Disgusted in Missouri” informed Nugent that he did not sign his letter “because I do not need a bunch of ‘queers’ writing dirty little notes to me,” assuring Nugent that he would “continue to do everything in my power to undermine the Church’s acceptance of this faggotry!” Alternative Catholic ministries for homosexuals did legitimize a popular conservative pastoral response by nuancing the separation of sexual orientation from behavior. Unlike NWM’s assimilationist model emphasizing sexual orientation, human rights, and human dignity, instead these programs focused on regulating sexual activity. Archbishop Hickey announced that he planned to begin a gay ministry program in the Washington, D.C. area in fall 1981, but he took limited action in implementing the program. At best, Gramick and Nugent had hoped the archbishop would recognize NWM as a viable option, but they were “not very optimistic” that Hickey’s ministry was “going to be anything creative due to a lack of viewpoints Hickey was willing to consider.” It was no surprise that Hickey later opted for a program called Courage developed by Father John Harvey in which gays and lesbians were encouraged to live chastely and find strength in community.

Fr. Harvey began informally counseling priests with same-sex desires in the seventies and published few articles on homosexuality until Cardinal Terrance Cook of New York formalized his work by asking the priest to begin a support group for Catholic clergy in New York that was later extended to include laity. Harvey’s Courage upheld the “love the sinner, hate the sin” dichotomy and prohibitive church teaching on sexuality. He supported the church position: homosexual activity was “essentially self–indulgent” and “proceed[ed] from a disordered sexual inclination.” He argued that the church’s position truly upheld “personal freedom and dignity” by using his program to “free” gays and lesbians of their sexual behavior. In Harvey’s assessments, Dignity, and NWM represented heretical, pseudo-Catholic groups that threatened his work by creating space for alternative voices and competition for his ministry. “Since the present teachings of Dignity are contrary to the magisterial position on homosexual
activity,” argued Harvey, “it should be requested either to change its positions, bringing them into harmony with Catholic teaching, or to be declared a dissenting group, to which homosexual Catholics should not belong.” It must be said that any program for Catholic homosexuals was controversial, but Courage and Harvey enjoyed official endorsements.

How difficult could it be for someone to be “healed” from homosexuality by becoming heterosexual? Easy? C. Brown from Brighton, Massachusetts, thought so. On a CCGCR flyer announcing an upcoming seminar, C. Brown frustrated with NWM returned the announcement, scribbling on it in red ink: “‘Gays’ are Sad. Try ‘Courage’ and Fr. Harvey. Celibacy is the answer!! Easy.” He crossed out a reference to Dignity and put question marks by the word “homophobia.” The disgruntled Brown distinguished between Courage and NWM and so did Harvey. Harvey set Courage in opposition to Dignity in his writings and publicly criticized NWM on numerous occasions. Gramick and Nugent realized the theological, ethical, and psychological answers for struggling gay and lesbian Catholics were not homogeneous. Nonetheless, they would not recommend Courage to distraught gay and lesbian Catholics due to fundamental disagreements with Harvey’s premises—not so much Courage’s goal of celibacy or chastity, but Harvey’s ideas that homosexuality was a sickness or a disorder. NWM never openly opposed Courage, and in fact invited Harvey to National Symposiums, but he repeatedly declined.

Sexual abstinence and self-discipline were the only moral options for Harvey and church authorities; yet, Catholic positions differed from some conservative Protestant viewpoints that conflated same-sex orientation and behavior, urging homosexuals to enter controversial ex-gay programs that claimed to cure both sexual orientation and behavior by emphasizing heterosexual marriage and children as the ultimate goal. These separate ministries commonly understand homosexual behavior as abnormal, unnatural, chosen, and sinful—something that could be “healed.” They assume that homosexual individuals can and should seek out therapy and techniques aimed to “cure” homosexual orientation with ex-gay groups such as Exodus International and Homosexuals Anonymous, among others. While Courage recognizes “coming out” of same-sex orientation as less plausible than most Protestant-affiliated ex-gay groups concede, Courage does share the philosophy and theology that physical and mental suffering could be the result of corruption and moral vice, but also an opportunity for spiritual growth and even holiness. For Courage same-sex desires are emotional wounds that need to be
healed or at best suffered through. In other words, the “homosexual condition” is a cross to bear.\textsuperscript{60}

Some bishops did establish ministries to gay and lesbian Catholics, but rejected Dignity and NWM workshops in favor of John Harvey’s Courage, but Harvey and the Vatican’s pastoral approach was deemed anti-pastoral and bifurcating by many Catholics who held a different, more reconciling optimism. NWM recognized that some bishops like San Francisco’s John R. Quinn in good conscience were working to offer a pastoral response to homosexuals. Yet Quinn and the majority of other bishop’s insistence that the “only option for homosexuals is continence and celibacy” was an inadequate response for Gramick and Nugent. Quinn failed to take into account “some of the serious questions raised in the past few years” by Catholic moralists who suggested that “homosexual expression in the context of a faithful, stable relationship tending towards permanency [was] not beyond their moral reach.”\textsuperscript{61} Nugent explained that, “The idea is that it’s better than promiscuity…or even a part of God’s plan.”\textsuperscript{62} Dignity and NWM taught lesbian or gay identity was a blessing, a gift of god, and liberating. Such optimism sprang from a theology of liberation and hope, but suffering for and with causes to fight injustice, or risking comfort in order to speak for the oppressed, was expected.

**Binding the Wounds**

Gramick, Nugent, and their supporters chose to recognize an inclusive postconciliar church that theoretically and doctrinally made room for gay and lesbian Catholics. Their optimism was not deterred by an increasingly conservative political and institutional church climate in the early 1980s. Instead they idealistically hoped dialogue with church leaders and at grassroots levels could further progress. In Fordham University professor of Theology Bradford E. Hinze’s investigation into adequate and failed practices of dialogue in the postconciliar church, he recently noted, “In work for justice, whether in efforts to promote structural changes in the social, political, or economic arenas, or in attempts at promoting reconciliation in communities torn apart by conflict and violence, dialogue is the medium of social healing and reconstruction.”\textsuperscript{63} Dialogue (or in Gramick and Nugent’s words “bridge building”) is a crucial ingredient in Catholic justice and peace groups. Educational forums, workshops, and retreats were forums for dialogue. But discourse was not always successful, especially when met with fear it would undermine clerical authority or resistance from those who thought dialogue failed to be confrontational, effective protest.\textsuperscript{64} Moreover, how was one to dialogue when each side
demonized the other? Maurice Shinnick, a gay Augustinian, Australian priest, like Gramick and Nugent, in his book *The Remarkable Gift: Being Gay and Catholic*, calls for the widest dialogue possible with the church on sexuality issues. Thus he admonishes readers that they should avoid “an exercise in Vatican bashing” despite the ecclesial hierarchy ignoring the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics. 65 Most gay and lesbian Catholics recognized the improbability of “dialoguing” with church leaders about same-sex love given that the official church refused to recognize gay and lesbian persons. If “Vatican bashing” was discouraged, ignoring Rome was just as easy.

Despite the palatable frustration on behalf of Catholic gays and lesbians and those that supported them, Gramick and Nugent worked on two levels to build bridges within the American Catholic community. First, gay and lesbians had to decide if they would stay in or leave the church. The choices were not always so clear (although NWM worked to open up a conversation for remaining in the church). Once could remain a practicing Catholic outspoken in their faith and open about their sexual orientation (a rare choice unless what it meant to be “practicing” was qualified), remain a practicing Catholic but remain quiescent, or create alternative Catholic spaces, such as Dignity, that allowed for full levels of faith and sexual expression. NWM existed to reconcile spirituality and sexuality or reconcile the church’s pastoral and moral teachings. Often this meant nuancing what “staying in” meant, ranging from claiming a Catholic cultural identity to participating in parish life.

Secondly, Gramick and Nugent worked to reconcile parents, clergy, ministers, and religious’ fears and misunderstandings regarding homosexuality with theological, psychological, sociological, and anthropological research. Bridge building was an oft-used metaphor for reconciling described by NWM, but according to Gramick their relationship to the larger Catholic Church could at times be more aptly illustrated by imagining NWM in a Catholic “universal crock-pot” with ingredients that had “been slow cooked for centuries.”66 Gramick delivered the National Dignity Convention’s Fifth Anniversary Address in spring of 1982 using the crock-pot metaphor to illustrate a diverse and pluralistic church, pointing out that “Dignity form[ed] some of the tastiest spices,” but she was not sure if church leaders always had the right recipes.67 For Gramick “unsavory elements of the stew” included the silencing of theologians, anti-gay statements by bishops, and censures, but Gramick’s list of “tasty ingredients” consisted of a slow, but increasing legitimization of gay ministry. She supposed that despite all of the
unsavory elements that Catholics were “not enraged.” Such was an idealistic hope given that multitudes of Catholics were enraged, especially by the mid-1980s and the release of the CDF’s “Letter to the Bishops.” In this instance, Gramick drastically underestimated the rancor.

How could Gramick make such an optimistic statement? From her perspective much work continued to be accomplished despite hierarchical backlash. Workshops remained popular, and laity, religious, priests, or even some bishops had not abandoned the topic of homosexuality and the church. Gramick and Nugent spoke from within and to the institutional church, recognizing their in between status as a strategy and a catalyst for change. NWM or Dignity did not appear on national or local diocesan Catholic directories—the status needed for official recognition. Gramick and Nugent, however, were a part of canonical religious orders and therefore had more protection and support, rather than an independent organization such as Dignity. Because of their respect for the universal church and their responsibility to their religious orders, Gramick and Nugent’s words and actions were more nuanced when dealing with the delicate subject of sexuality. As a nationwide organization, by the 1980s Dignity had more autonomy and was a much needed ministry for thousands of gay and lesbian Catholics looking for an affirming community and place to celebrate mass. Many Dignity members were outspoken critics of the institutional church and because Dignity was an autonomous religious group, many church leaders viewed Dignity as dissident and radical.

Although Dignity leaders could speak candidly and freely about the institutional church’s failures to consider the experiences of gay and lesbian Catholics, Gramick and Nugent labored to convey the message that the institutional church and hierarchical authorities were not “the enemies,” nor was “Vatican bashing” (in public) constructive. They offered prophetic visions of hope despite setbacks, encouraging gay and lesbian Catholics to relate to the institutional with “patient, on-going dialogue rather than confrontation,” pleading that gays and lesbians are the church—the people of God. Admittedly, the hierarchical magisterium also constitutes the church, yet for Gramick, the hierarchy did not define faith communities. Gramick begged Catholic gays and lesbian to not desert the church because it would “abdicate to these ecclesiastical authorities more power than they deserve.” Gramick’s “10 New Lesbian Gay Commandments” summarized her prophetic vision for gay and lesbian Catholics:

1. Thou shalt not perpetuate the unsavory elements of the stew.
2. Thou shalt not allow others to name thee by stereotypes.
3. Thou shalt not remain in the awakening stage too long, but move to justifiable anger and empowerment.
4. Thou shalt write and recite thine own history.
5. Thou shalt work to overcome heterosexism and homophobia.
6. Thou shalt remember the suffering of thy ancestors during the waiting period.
7. Thou shalt celebrate thy dignity and goodness.
8. Thou shalt always be mindful of God’s love for thee.
9. Thou shalt go forth with laughter and song.
10. Thou shalt take thyself seriously, but not too seriously.73

At other times, Gramick illustrated the relationship between church authorities and gay and lesbian Catholics by imagining a giant, beautiful oak tree with thousands of unfolding branches. The one majestic tree represented universal Catholicism, but Gramick pictured herself on one side of the tree and Vatican officials on the other.74 True, they both existed on the same tree; nonetheless, the image collapses when one side wants to prune the other or fails recognize they existed on the same tree. To extend the metaphor, curial officials might argue their offices are like the tree trunk that anchors the universal church. NWM represented a flimsy limb. Gramick and Nugent might have initiated Catholic gay ministry and publicized the needs of gay and lesbian Catholics, but for the most part, a true dialogue with the Roman curia did not take place, nor did defensive and protective church leaders officially instigate dialogue.75

Prophetic Parody or Misguided Prophets?

While some outspoken gay Catholics like author Fr. Maurice Shinnick recognized they existed within power relations and adjusted their experiences and resources to negotiate institutional church structures, other dissatisfied gay and lesbian Catholics felt it increasingly difficult to remain within the church and “Vatican bashing” was fair game—or at least provided opportunities for parody.76 The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, an outrageous street theater group, began donning habits in the streets of San Francisco in 1979 and grew to be a worldwide “congregation” with over twenty “convents.” Their entertaining street performances and humor have paved nearly three decades of philanthropic efforts that have raised thousands of dollars for numerous health and social service agencies serving the GLBT population. However, their satirical names, such as Sister Anal Receptive, Sister Risque of the Sissytine Chapel, or Sister Missionary Position, did offend sisters like Sister Mary Hilgeman, CSJ. The sister, deeply concerned and saddened, feared the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence unfairly represented religious women who “both individually and as communities, have supported the ministry to gay and
Sr. Hilgeman was especially concerned about the caricature Sister Boom Boom whom she saw appear on a television interview, and although her gay friends assured the Sister of Saint Joseph of Carondelet “that there was no slur intended on religious women,” she wanted to know the “true meaning” of the outrageously dressed sister in drag. Sister Boom Boom, or Jack Fertig, was known as a Sister of Perpetual Indulgence who pushed the street performance envelope, even running on the “nun from above” ticket in the 1982 Supervisor of San Francisco election, coming close to winning. Br. Rick Garcia responded to Sr. Hilgeman’s concerns assuring her that the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence were not Catholic, nor connected to a Catholic group, but that besides their “outrageous political activities,” they did provide community service for dozens of good causes. “Be assured,” comforted Garcia, “that I am not justifying these men’s caricatures or political tactics. They do cause a great deal of controversy within the gay community and many people in the mainstream movement are embarrassed by them.” Vatican officials were more than embarrassed by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, officially placing them on the papal list of heretics after their “welcoming” of John Paul II to San Francisco in 1987. Their staged exorcism in Union Square and several other less-than-honoring antics landed them on the short list of heretics.

The pope was an easy target. Catholic gay activist, Brian McNaught, supported Gramick and Nugent’s moderate educational goals, but from Nugent’s perspective, McNaught’s critical commentary on the institutional church was particularly isolating, damaging, and ineffective. For example, McNaught wrote a satirical piece for a March 1976 edition of The Advocate entitled “The Naked Pope” in which his ironic tale implemented the pope and church hierarchy in homosexual sex, plots, pederasty, and the enjoyable pleasure of their lovers. McNaught learned that Nugent had used “The Naked Pope” in his workshops as an example of what to not do or say in the advancement for gay civil rights and tolerance. McNaught felt betrayed and wrote Nugent to abate a potential breech of cooperation and friendship, arguing there was a place and a need to write “The Naked Pope” and also a need to speak to Dignity and NWM audiences. “In the end you hope you have said something to everyone at one time or another,” commented McNaught, “which will convince them, as you [Nugent] yourself are convinced, that it is a Church worth fighting and worth fighting for.” McNaught admitted he would “have left the Church a long time ago,” if he “didn’t love it,” and rationalized his righteous anger and satirical outlet of expression at the church because he believed “in its call.”
Mari Castellanos of Miami, Florida, also had no difficulty expressing her anger at ecclesiastical powers. When she received a NWM fundraising letter that began with a quote from Pope John Paul II, she immediately ceased reading and wrote Gramick and Nugent assuring them that “I love you both and I will always support New Ways. But PLEASE don’t start a letter with the Pope and whatever the hell he said.” She begged, “Please, please ENOUGH OF THE POPE, THE BISHOPS & THE CHURCH!” Castellanos wanted to abandon attempts at dialogue with church leaders. “ Lets just do our ministry, be church together and the hell with them!..I am so sick of them. Look at what they’ve done to you, to all of us, and what they continue to do.”

Distraught and frustrated writers were more than willing to point out cases of church leaders being “more Catholic than Church” or more ecclesiastical, orthodox, and doctrinely focused, rather than recognizing the experiences of people of God that make up the church. Yes, gay and lesbian Catholics were enraged. NWM’s writings, workshops, and goals were considered radical by their detractors, even if their ministry was defensively moderate in public—perhaps too conservative by some.

NWM’s academic symposiums, which failed to espouse advocacy or political action, appeared disingenuous for Catholics desiring more radical protest. The suggestion that homosexuality was neutral with no implications for religion or politics was absurd, given that symposiums and workshops were political acts—not morally neutral places for the free exchange of information. Homosexuality had everything to do with sex. Gramick and Nugent never publicly denounced the church’s moral teaching on homogenital acts, even though they presented the moral teaching alongside various theological, pastoral, psychological, and sociological viewpoints for the purposes of discussion and meaningful dialogue. For many gay and lesbian Catholics, this was not enough. Mary Ann Fleetwood accused Nugent of denying homogential relationships in his late 1970s writings and thus failing to promote “sound mental health” by trapping individuals with damaging guilt. “Advocacy of denial,” she wrote, “would seem to insist still that homosexual sexuality is ‘bad.’” Mary Crane of Aptos, California, articulated the common critique:

New Ways Ministry public position that homosexuality is all right as long as not consummated is vastly repressive and perpetuates an enormous sin against love. To say we may be homosexual but not sexual says that our love is inferior, psychologically sick and unworthy. ….If privately you condon [sic] sex acts between gay people, then you are being hypocritical and you do little to end the monstrous [sic] authoritarianism and totalitarianism of the Catholic Church that has done irreparable damage to so many
people’s lives. …To be really helpful to gay people you must be openly supportive of gay sex.⁸⁹

Nugent responded to Crane with a sterile, safe answer. “Strictly speaking, New Ways does not have any ‘public position’ on homosexuality;” wrote Nugent, “it is an educational ministry and the only thing it advocates is education.” He did assent that many gay and lesbian Catholics, and perhaps even some on the NWM staff, had no problem reconciling same-sex orientation and sexual behavior and would probably “employ it in their personal and private counseling and direction, but it is not the public position of the group.” Nugent determined that a public position on the morality of sexual behavior would stifle the expression of a variety of opinions, and furthermore, “certainly endanger the work of the organization.”⁹⁰ Gramick and Nugent were convinced that their work for enlightenment and education from within the church “had a quiet but powerful impact on the institution much more so than if the group were to publicly and openly challenge church doctrine and risk being put out of existence entirely.”⁹¹ Nugent’s response did not pacify Crane who demanded to be immediately removed the mailing list, “As long as your organization is not openly supportive of same-sex relationships and altogether critical of the official Catholic Church’s position on gay sex,” chastised Crane, “I do not want your mailings. Honestly, I find your organization counter-productive to the needs of those of us who have had the courage not to deny love simply because it came in the person of someone of the same sex as ourselves.”⁹²

Fleetwood and Crane had a point. Were Gramick and Nugent further bifurcating the painful orientation and behavior divide in their pastoral rhetoric emphasizing compassion, and human rights, while presenting the church’s moral teaching prohibiting behavior (albeit among diverse theological opinions that allowed for measures of sexual expression)? Did their mission to speak to the church from within only reinforce the unrealistic orientation/behavior dichotomy? Gay and lesbian Catholics listening to NWM and struggling to associate with the church potentially encountered an unbridgeable divide. In a letter addressed to Mr. Gaston Cadieux, Editor of Diaspora, but carbon copied to Gramick, Nugent, and Paul Weidig the president of Dignity, Jerry Beck of Gays/Two/Three expressed his anger that NWM and Dignity were excessively conservative in their ideologies, message, and ministry. He feared their work was further crippling gay Catholics because for Beck the church was too great an enemy to seek reconciliation. He blamed NWM and Dignity for serving as havens for “a high degree of crippled
Christians.” “Since this small percentage of gay Catholic population looms so in the experience of Sister Gramick and Father Nugent,” wrote Beck, “one wonders whether their ‘New Ways’ ministry hasn’t more to do with neurotics than with homosexuals, more to do with Christians than with Gays?” Beck accused Gramick and Nugent of endeavoring to jade the “Church to endorse Civil Rights for Gays.” In his estimation Gramick and Nugent converted “their remarks from bad judgment to blasphemy—for by substituting smarmy persuasion for Gospel confrontation and metanoia, they reduce the Church to just one more politically manipulatable agency.” Beck inculpated Gramick and Nugent for demoting a radical Gospel and thus robbing “gay Christians of their vocation to challenge the Church and themselves to eschatological holiness.” The distraught Beck could not fathom why NWM did not have a deeper realization that “it’s one thing to suffer for the Church, it’s quite extraordinarily another thing to suffer at the hands of the Church.”

Gramick and Nugent acknowledged their negotiated situation was complicated. Dignity provided the public space and voice to comment on sexual ethics, but NWM avoided the topic—excluding it from public dialogue—in hopes of preserving a moderate position. Speaking more to ministers, sisters, friends and parents of gay and lesbian Catholics, their message was pastoral, giving words of hope, offering comfort, and making small steps toward acceptance. Alternatives to Dignity’s safe space for gay and lesbian Catholics and NWM’s messages of reconciliation were limited. Ramon Wagner, the Salvatorian provincial, rationalized the Salvatorian ministry to homosexuals as well as Nugent’s work as needed options. “The gay person and the minister who wishes to relate to the gay community find themselves in a vacuum in which the resources and support of the Christian community are substantially lacking,” wrote Wagner. Like the NWM model, the Salvatorian ministry to homosexuals, provided no theological answers condoning full and creative expression of same-sex love, but they wanted to offer hope and at least present same-sex orientation as positive expression of human dignity. The alternative was bleak. If no ministries were available, gay and lesbian Catholics would have to “work out the struggle for themselves.”

An Uncertain Future or Continued Compromise?

Fr. Wagner worried about immediate available resources for gay and lesbian Catholics, but others were looking far into the future. Fr. Paul Kabat, OMI optimistically determined that the contentious understanding of homogential behavior as sin within the larger Catholic
community would eventually “fade away like the recent issue of birth control.” It is true that lay Catholics in large numbers did ignore *Humanae Vitae*, and while same sex love and expression grew to be more tolerated, such issues did not fade from the Roman curia’s purview, nor the lay Catholic imagination. Instead the magisterium reinstated authoritarian control due to perceived loss of authority, lax sexual ethics, and lagging attention of the faithful. Sex did not fade away—it became the focus of many Vatican investigations and pronouncements.

Despite attempts by Roman officials to silence discussions on homosexuality, such obstacles did not daunt gay and lesbian Catholics and their supporters who developed new organizations to fight injustice and homophobia. For instance, the Task Force on Lesbian/Gay Issues in the San Francisco Archdiocese released its polemical report *Homosexuality and Social Justice* in September 1982. As result of their controversial findings, the diocese quickly disbanded the group, only for the Task Force to reorganize as a separate structure under the leadership of Kevin Gordon, a gay psychotherapist and theologian, to form The Consultation on Homosexuality, Social Justice, and Roman Catholic Theology. The national group of Catholic lay people focused on research and education, advised by a board composed of leaders from the National Gay Task Force, Dignity, as well as several scholars including John Boswell and feminist theologians Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Mary Hunt. The group’s goals included pursuing its own interdisciplinary research on sexuality and theology as well as “monitor and critique” statements on homosexuality issued by dioceses and archdioceses pronouncing, “The days of edicts and fiats on this topic are over.”

Neither did resistance disconcert church authorities. The Vatican continued to clarify its position on homosexuality, increasingly defining it against the pastoral responses of 1975 and 1976. In effect these changes left little room for ministries like New Ways and effectively closed the door on Dignity. The 1986 CDF “Letter to the Bishops” reinforced the 1975 distinction between the homosexual condition and action in fear that it was the Vatican’s belief that “an overly benign interpretation was given to the homosexual condition itself…” The document continued, “Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is more or less a strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder.” With just a few short sentences, the Vatican set back the years of work accomplished by NWM and Dignity.
If the “objective disorder” accusation was not enough, the document went on to glibly suggest it was a shame that homosexuals were treated discriminately:

But the proper reaction to crimes committed against homosexual persons should not be to claim that the homosexual condition is not disordered. When such a claim is made and when homosexual activity is consequently condoned, or when civil legislation is introduced to protect behavior to which no one has any conceivable right, neither the church nor society at large should be surprised when other distorted notions and practices gain ground, and irrational and violent reactions increase.99

Then the Sacred Congregation asked “the Bishops to be especially cautious of any programs which may seek to pressure the Church to change her teaching, even while claiming not to do so.”100 What were the effects of the letter? Hickey’s desire to root out ministries like New Ways was vindicated, and many Dignity chapters were forced to remove their meeting locations from diocesan grounds.101

Most immediate reactions to the letter exclusively blamed Rome and Cardinal Ratzinger for their infallible stance that seemed to remove all notions of human experience and pastoral care from the issue.102 A huge outcry of pain emanated from gay and lesbian Catholics, supportive families, religious, and justice ministries. What was NWM response? Although the 1986 letter seemed like an insurmountable regression for their work, Gramick and Nugent continued their efforts to “build bridges” (even while not serving as the co-directors of NWM). This meant not dismissing the letter as homophobic outright, but forming strategies to continue the conversation.103 Moral theologian Charles Curran described his friends Gramick and Nugent as those who could avoid “the temptation of name-calling and angry recriminations” present “in the midst of such turmoil, strident voices, bitter denunciations, and angry epithets [that] often fill the air.”104

Gramick and Nugent continued to present varieties of pastoral and ethical approaches to homosexuality within the Catholic community. Despite much “personal pain and suffering,” they remained “hopeful that the personal changes and steady institutional growth” they had “witnessed over the years in positive attitudes and practices toward gay and lesbian people will continue as the church wrestle with theological and pastoral issues.”105 Although Gramick and Nugent voiced a public hoped for “a resolution to the discussion and debate on homosexuality,” pragmatically they were willing to position NWM somewhere in the middle of the tension, knowing that institutional resolution was highly unlikely. Instead they focused on individual
consciences. The bridge would not be imploded anytime soon. In other words, resolution with the upper levels of church hierarchy was highly unlikely, but hope resided at the local level and even with reconciling individual consciences. Gramick and Nugent did not so much reconcile, but intersect the bifurcation of love and hate. Archbishop Hickey accused Gramick and Nugent of ambiguity, and perhaps he feared the contested space between good and evil, right and wrong, or purity and impurity. Hickey had reason to worry because as cultural theorists propose: ambiguity exposes instabilities, providing space for rupture, interrogation, and creative expressions of resistance.

For many gay and lesbian Catholics the setbacks and solidarity in the experiences of suffering and rejection were no longer productive. Much of the scholarly literature on LGBT peoples and religion (not to mention autobiographies) is indebted to the reoccurring themes of suffering. According to Gary David Comstock, the experience of LGBT peoples and religion “is really a process of wounding and suffering.” This was even more evident in a Catholic theological worldviews of sin and guilt. For instance, Edward Freeman wrote Raymond Wagner, SDS offering his support for the Salvatorian ministry to gays and lesbians, admiring the community’s courage. After Jesuit John McNeill’s silencing in 1977, Freeman could not help by ponder if “an irreparable wound had been struck between the Church and the gay community.” He worried that “prejudice toward the ecclesiastical powers” he witnessed in the gay and lesbian community would be too to severe to reconcile. For Freeman working in gay ministry was an exercise in “binding wounds” through uncharted territory, or in terms of a spiritual practice, like walking a labyrinth trusting the resolution will come. It was an exercise in meditating on the journey by meditating on the process of journeying.

Catholics recognized the church’s stance on homosexuality had become increasingly prohibitive and punitive by the mid-1980s, but some like historian and friend of Gramick and Nugent, John Boswell, remained a dedicated Catholic. Admittedly, a practicing Episcopalian would be much easier and more comfortable for gay Catholics, but for Boswell, comfort was “not the central drama of salvation.” Boswell may have come to some level of reconciliation, but lesbian Catholics like Christina Love struggled with desires to maintain and follow Catholic teaching while retaining a positive sense of self. Gramick and Nugent believed suffering was a central drama of Catholic identity and theology, but suffering was not something
to endure for no reason or out of self-hatred or guilt. Instead, one was to recreate the central drama of salvation and suffer as Jesus did for the purposes of fighting injustice against the oppressed. This is the role of the prophet—loved by God, but often hated by his constituents—who rarely experiences prophecy becoming reality. Hope for Gramick and Nugent relied not only in social theories but also in optimistic theologies: God’s justice works in the present, but also resides beyond what is actualized.\textsuperscript{111}

American religionist Robert Orsi recently theorized that religious worlds and meanings are constructed in processes of wounding.\textsuperscript{112} Whether that is a gay or lesbian Catholic coming to terms with traditional teachings on same-sex desire by remaining in the closet or substantiating the teachings, each makes their religious worlds in the perplexing, oftentimes cruel in between times. Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes that the relationship between theory and praxis take on a whole new dimension when unfortunately spurned by experiences of suffering and survival. Meaning making is remade and recast, not always resolved, through the intersections of pleasure and pain, personal chaos and pleasure, as well as love and cruelty.\textsuperscript{113} While Gramick and Nugent hoped to ease the pain of hurt and rejection they also realized that their collective experiences as a reform movement were not without struggle. For this particular community of Catholics “to be Catholic” meant negotiating the delicate space between cultivating love for the church and experiencing hate at the hands of the church. As a reform group facing the tensions of attempting to work with and within a religious tradition, the experiences of “the inseparability of change and permanence and the interaction of hope and pain” are inevitable.\textsuperscript{114} What is queer about New Ways Ministry was and is their openness to transformation, emergence, and mystery in their delicate dance performance between accommodation and resistance.\textsuperscript{115}
CHAPTER FIVE: QUE(E)RYING POSTCONCILIAR CATHOLIC REFORM:

“We continue to seek ways to negotiate carefully the choppy waters of the ecclesiastical seas.”

Some bridges could be built. Some women religious, brothers, and priests could articulate a more complicated understanding of homosexuality thanks to NWM’s educational efforts. Some Catholics could extend their education to social justice action, protest, and legal reform. Some would learn how to negotiate with superiors and within their dioceses to initiate dialogue on homosexuality. Some families could love and accept their gay child. Some gay and lesbian Catholics could reconcile their consciences and some could be reconciled with a Catholic religiosity. No one thought the pope would wake up and change his mind on the morality of same-sex love. Realistically, what type of bridge could be built with the magisterium?

Prophetic Vision or Hopeless Cause?

Gramick and Nugent’s ministries and personal relationships were fulfilling; their relationships to the magisterium and church hierarchy were not. They interpreted their gendered and social relations to church authority in different ways because their distinct places in the church as a priest and a sister defined relationships with their religious communities and options for ministry. They were caught amid not wanting to overburden their superiors or risk damaging their religious communities’ reputations, but they also asked their leaders and communities to devote much time, effort, and sacrifice on their behalf. Both Gramick and Nugent had supportive, justice-minded women and men (even bishops) between them and the Vatican who were willing to brave ecclesiastical intervention and impediments to their ministry. After all, their respective religious communities had assigned each to gay ministry. Their congregations generally agreed that “homosexually oriented” persons were “moral and social outcast[s]” in society in need of pastoral care and advocacy. What could be a more needed ministry then ministering to sexual minorities who constituted the “people of God?”

Gramick and Nugent’s superiors became markedly involved in defending NWM after the 1979 Lesbian Nun Retreat spurred disquieted Catholics to register several complaints with the Roman curia’s Scared Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (CRSI). Before this time, Salvatorian and School Sister of Notre Dame leaders were able to deflect local and regional complaints, such as defending Gramick’s testimony at an anti-discrimination ordinance hearing
or responding to a Salvatorian religious community donor who wrote an angry letter demanding clarification about Nugent’s involvement with a controversial ministry. Cooperating with Vatican investigations and politics was an entirely different matter of diplomacy that required the most careful, measured response. For the most part School Sisters of Notre Dame and Salvatorian leaders were willing to defend NWM and negotiate ecclesiastical pressure on behalf of Gramick and Nugent. If the Roman curia expressed an inkling of unhappiness about a controversial ministry or outspoken religious, the Vatican supposed most general superiors or provincials would order the matter terminated. Not so with Gramick and Nugent’s leaders who failed to be intimidated by the Vatican’s inquiries, but corresponding with the CRSI did take perseverance, nerves, and patience. Some leaders were better at it then others. While Gramick and Nugent served in gay ministry over several decades, leadership positions rotated within their respective religious communities and each new superior general or provincial had to pick up where the other left off—a few grew more tired of the politics and negotiating than others.

Gramick’s provincial in the late 1970s Sr. Ruther Marie May was not exactly thrilled to handle the fallout from the Lesbian Nuns Retreat, but she was loyal to Gramick and the ministry. The provincial worked closely with General Superior Sr. Mary Margaret Johanning in their diplomatic dealings with the CRSI. The slow pace of bureaucracy worked to their advantage as it took several years for the CRSI to follow up on Gramick and Nugent after the initial publicity surrounding the Lesbian Nuns Retreat. It also took time to review publications and NWM materials on file in Vatican offices. Coincidentally, Gramick and Nugent’s superiors neglected to hastily respond to inquiries that requested appraisals of Gramick and Nugent for the purposes of 1) delaying intervention and 2) spending an extended amount of time on their own evaluations gathering input from bishops and workshop attendees. Granted the delayed correspondence and judgment from the Vatican had the potential to be agonizing, even paralyzing for those waiting for a response, but Gramick and Nugent typically used the intervening time between correspondence to carry on with their work without significant adjustment or anxiety.

Sr. May provided a written evaluation of Gramick to the CRSI in February 1982 and ensured investigators that School Sisters of Notre Dame leaders had employed their own thorough evaluations of the sister through meetings with the provincial team, dialogue with Gramick, regular contact and correspondence, and an awareness of all of Gramick’s activities
and publications. Perhaps because work with non-gays was less controversial, Sr. May highlighted in her report that she and the provincial team encouraged Gramick to continue to develop her work with “non-gays in terms of consciousness raising and education.” She boldly vindicated Gramick as a loyal daughter of the church who dutifully presented church teaching. This assertion was of course in response to Hickey’s accusations that Gramick and Nugent advocated “the opinions of others” (“others” meaning revisionist moral theologians and theologians who are in disagreement about sexual ethics) as “viable options” in their workshops and symposiums. The sister also reassured the Sacred Congregation that Gramick and Nugent had a high degree intellectual honesty and skill; thus, the pair presented “opinions” for the principle of direct dialogue not for ranking these opinions over and above church teaching. When closing her report the provincial recommended Gramick’s ministry should not be diminished in any way as it was theologically and pastorally judicious, but she promised to keep monitoring the situation through continued dialogue with Gramick. Sr. May pledged her loyalty to the church and its leaders’ “responsible decisions.” The repeated polite requests for dialogue saturated religious communities’ correspondence with the CRSI, reminding evaluators to consider the pastoral dimensions and complexities of ministry, particularly delicate ministries to sexual minorities. As if to soften their potential criticism with decorum, she expressed confidence in the Sacred Congregation upholding the “healing effects” of dialogue when they considered her evaluation.

The same year General Superior Sr. Johanning met with the CRSI regarding the work of Gramick and sent a copy of the taped interview to Sr. May and the provincial team in Baltimore. During this meeting the CRSI asked the generalates present to pass on orders to Gramick, Nugent, and their provincials: each was to submit written responses to specific questions about Gramick and Nugent’s ministry, publications, and stance on church teachings. Specifically the CRSI concerned themselves with Nugent and Gramick’s opinions on the moral distinction between homosexual activity and homosexual orientation, asking if they agreed with the official church teaching that postured homosexual sexual behavior as “morally wrong.” Provincials were to evaluate Gramick and Nugent’s writings (especially *Homosexual Catholics: A New Primer for Discussion*) and provide a written evaluation of NWM’s programs. Finally, each superior general was to recommend the “pastoral action” regarding Fr. Nugent and Sr. Gramick’s “apostolates with homosexuals.”

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Nearly two months later, Sr. May provided Sr. Johanning with her evaluation and Gramick’s response. Sr. May, Baltimore province apostolate director Sr. Patricia Flynn, and Gramick sought help from moral theologian Fr. Richard McCormick, SJ in crafting their rejoinders. McCormick recognized the difficulty in answering the CRSI’s question about the morality of sexual acts as one would need to qualify specific pastoral situations. He offered to provide his position statement in their materials and risked his own censorship. Despite the contingency of advice, Gramick decided not to directly answer the question. She worried that the exclusive interrogation presented could not be retorted “in isolation from equally important ones [questions].” To do so would risk a distortion of “a correct perception” of her pastoral ministry. Instead of forthrightly answering, she audaciously requested dialogue with representatives of the CRSI for the purposes of providing an unabridged context of her pastoral ministry.

The 1982 evaluation is just but one of dozens of examples in which Gramick’s superiors worked with her, strategized, and negotiated on her behalf. Each time a complaint letter from a bishop was received by the superior general, she would request clarification from the provincial and apostolate director who would then provide detailed explanation of steps needed to address the inquiry and how to assess each step. Commonplace strategies included calling workshop participants to ask their opinion of Gramick and Nugent or soliciting letters of support form bishops or theologians. Except it took Gramick, Nugent, and their leaders some time to learn that women religious communities’ support did not carry much weight with Vatican officials, nor did letters from bishops unless the letters came from the “right” bishops. Despite such politics, without exception Gramick’s leaders reaffirmed her ministry and rendered the sister as a devoted, educated, qualified, bold, and a courageous woman religious whose work and presentations “were neither inflammatory nor derogatory of the Catholic Church and her teachings.”

Gramick wrote that she never doubted her call to be a School Sister of Notre Dame. In fact the times of turmoil and anxiety over how to respond to investigations encouraged the sister to confront injustice and be grateful for the times of stabilization. Yet there were periods when her future relationship with the School Sisters was also uncertain. How much pressure could her congregation endure?

Women religious’ support of lesbian and gay ministry merits the question: were women religious more willing to confront authoritative resistance, as religious studies professor Mary Jo Weaver has determined, because sisters had “little to lose and much to gain by challenging the
Was it because sisters were considered less connected to the institution and thus had greater flexibility? For most of American Catholic history, the hierarchy excluded nuns from falling under episcopal authority; yet, laity revered them as more sacred then profane, occupying a needed, particular place in parish and church life. Looking back, Gramick felt very much appreciated and validated in her work by laity and fellow religious. She did at times, however, feel like an outsider in the sense that higher levels of the institution were not receptive to what she had to say, and a part of her longed for approval from a church she deeply loved and served. Gramick had no reason to doubt that her name would be cleared during each investigation. She considered herself an orthodox sister and had resolved that she was not breaking any rules—if only those in power would let her speak, explain her ministry, and listen to the needs of gay and lesbian Catholics. Gramick maintained conviction that the Vatican would rationally and reasonably consider her ministry, but by the late 1980s she also had a broader historical perspective that proved otherwise. She had lived through increasing conservative backlash and had mustered her way through the scary, harsh, and uncharted CRIS investigation with twenty-three other sisters who had signed a New York Times advertisement calling for more dialogue on abortion. By the 21st century she able to surmise approval is “not going to come.”

Mary Jo Weaver has pointed out that the history of American sisters over the last fifty years has been a narrative fraught with ironies. Sisters’ self-perceptions as outsiders led to a particular insider club of women who shared a collective vision for religious renewal and what it meant to participate in social justice ministries. Gramick is a member of a tight group of women religious, including a longtime friend of the late Sr. Margaret Ellen Traxler, a fellow School Sister from the Minnesota province. Traxler was an influential sister to justice issues raging from race relations, women’s ordination, and ecumenical dialogue to improving the lives of marginalized, poor women and families. She founded the National Coalition of American Nuns (NCAN), of which Gramick has served on the board since the early 1980s. In fact, NCAN was one of the first Catholic organizations to release a statement for gay and lesbian human rights by calling for an end to discrimination in September 1974. Traxler helped Gramick “get her feet wet” when it came “to knowing people in social justice work” in the mid-1970s. She and Gramick also weathered the infamous backlash from signing the Catholics for a Free Choice advertisement in 1984. Traxler defended the work of Gramick and NWM throughout her career along with Gramick’s fellow colleagues in the Women’s Ordination
Conference and the National Assembly of Religious Women among others. Gramick networked not only with dear friends and allies, but also sisters who committed themselves to solidarity and justice with those among whom they worked outside and within the church. Not fully a part of American culture (as distinct from Catholic life) or trusted by higher levels of church authority, nor outsiders in Catholic life or contemporary social reform movements, sisters like Jeannine Gramick, carved out prominent ministry in the junctions of American postconciliar Catholic culture.

While Gramick had religious leaders and sisters who legitimized her ministry, of course not all School Sisters of Notre Dame were excited about her work and were even more offended to receive NWM mailings. The dissent speaks to the diversity and tensions within women’s religious communities experimenting with renewal in religious life. Not every School Sister was willing to “dialogue” about homosexuality. Martin Therese Gensler, SSND of Chicago returned NWM material warning, “Don’t EVER use my name again.” Inside was a note that read, “I am and have been sending my contributions to ‘Moral Majority.’ I feel they are fighting for the right cause. I’m ashamed of yours.” Although she did not send money to Rev. Jerry Falwell, Sister Mary Lillian McCormack, SSND of New Orleans wanted to be promptly removed from the NWM mailing list too. “Instead of a donation to further the cause,” quipped Sr. McCormack, “I will have a Holy Mass said in reparation for the scandal caused by such movements.” Sister Brendan Marie of Gramick’s own Baltimore province announced that she had “never been involved in the cause” (even though it was an approved apostolate of the School Sisters), and she could not imagine how her name was included on the mailing list. “I don’t personally care about the cause in itself, but I do prefer to choose my cause vs. being chosen. There has got to be a legal answer to sources for mailing lists. If I receive material from NEW WAYS MINISTRY again, I will check into the matter,” warned the sister.

A majority of the correspondence to Gramick’s superiors expressed concern about Hickey’s charge that Gramick and Nugent purported ambiguous church teachings. Many perturbed writers demanded clarification concerning Gramick and Nugent’s position on the morality of same-sex activity. For instance, Julie Loesch, a self-described former pro-lifer and peace activist, wrote Gramick and Nugent’s superior generals for elucidation on the work of NWM. These types of inquiries placed superiors in an awkward position: supporting NWM but
also convincing solicitous Catholics that they had control of the situation. Sister Mary Margaret Johanning, SSND, responded to Loesch’s misgiving:

I really appreciate your stance, Julie, the supporting of ministries which teach insightfully and persuasively, the church’s teaching of human sexuality. I also agree with you that a Catholic outreach to gay men and lesbians is urgently needed…Both Sister Jeannine and Father Bob Nugent insist that New Ways does teach the church’s vision regarding homosexual activity. I have indicated to both Jeannine and Bob that I believe they could present this teaching in a clearer manner than they do. Certainly, for several years I have been in dialogue with Sister Jeannine, trying to collaborate with her in ensuring that New Ways does express Catholic teaching clearly.22

The complaint letters to Gramick and Nugent’s superiors and the CRSI expressed an understanding (or lack of understanding) about homosexuality. Complainers presented sexuality as a black and white issue when Gramick and Nugent understood Catholic gays and lesbians’ relationships to the church in more complicated theological, social, and pastoral terms. Gramick and Nugent were fearful to answer in writing without a conversation about their ministry in which the intricacies could be revealed. Nugent also avoided directly answering questions that he thought could be used against him. Consider that in February 1982 Superior General Rogowski wrote Nugent requesting a written response for the following question: “Do you accept as the sole option for Catholics the following official teaching of the Church: ‘Homosexual activity, as distinguished from homosexual orientation, is morally wrong?’”23 Distraught by Rogowski’s “tone” and the “inquisitorial question,” Nugent felt he could not respond “without clarification and dialogue with the questioner.” He worried who was asking the question in the first place? Nugent promised Rogowski that he did not mean to confuse the issue but deduced that there was more to the interrogation than presented and that he need more background information before clarifying.24 No dialogue was granted or more background given to Nugent, but Rogowski continued to experience pressure from the CRSI to remove Nugent from NWM and gay ministry all together.

As a priest Nugent’s relationship with authorities was different than Gramick’s. He felt like a persona non grata in Philadelphia once he left the archdiocese on unofficial leave in the early 1970s, but his transitional period was not as a tremendous burden because he continued functioning quietly as a priest.25 He did, however, have difficulty in obtaining faculties (permission from bishop to hear confessions, officiate mass, preach, etc.), especially in the Washington, D.C. archdiocese. By the mid-1980s his infamy had spread. Since leaving his
sabbatical at Yale in 1983, Nugent found himself once again in a provisionary state without a permanent location or an official ministry. He wrote the Salvatorian personnel director Dennis Thiessen to reflect on various possibilities for his ministry, ultimately hoping he could find a position that would allow him to have faculties, but also allow him to continue to travel and give workshops. The problem was that even more progressive dioceses were reluctant to grant him faculties or a residence for fear that the CRSI would inform the local bishop about the restrictions under which Nugent was to pursue gay ministry. Nugent could be considered a liability and few bishops were willing to risk their reputations. The Salvatorian personnel director hoped Nugent would settle down, “establish some permanent roots” and “get on” with his “life and ministry.” While the need to have official faculties was a problem that Nugent constantly endured, he did not feel that an “in-between” appointment was a pejorative status. Instead he rejected the “bureaucratic neatness” of “clerical life” in favor of an exciting ministry that he liked to the apostle Paul’s tent-making ministry and travels. In terms of ministry and his work with NWM, Nugent claims he never felt like an outsider because his work was validated not only by most of his Salvatorian religious community but most importantly by gay and lesbian Catholics and their families.

Like Gramick’s leaders, Nugent’s superiors were also nervous about his public appearances and controversial reputation. By the mid-1980s Nugent’s superior general grew weary of the investigations and energy needed to sustain Nugent’s work. What Nugent considered productive dialogue with the superior about his ministry, Rogowski indigently considered “at least seven years” of “unending discussion.” Near the end of his term as generalate, Rogowski grew particularly frustrated with what he described as Nugent’s “continued association with groups dissenting from the Church’s teaching on homosexuality and” his “stupid remarks in the mass media.” Provincial Barry Griffin attempted to smooth over Rogowski’s accusations, assuring Nugent that he was sure the outburst was “his parting shot” (the Rev. Malachy McBride took over the generalate later that year). The provincial, too, was growing weary, not from the CRSI’s continued investigation into Nugent, but what he felt was the overall heavy-handedness of an increasingly conservative church that tied the community up into investigations and cases. “Will it never end?” he asked.

With the release of the CDF’s 1986 “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons,” Gramick, Nugent, and their superiors felt the pressure of
mounting intervention on the part of Archbishop Hickey and his appeals to the Roman curia to intercede. The possibility for church hierarchy impeding their ministry was always present but manageable. No one expected to “win over” Hickey, but they did hope for due process and rational discussion. No one expected bishops’ committees or the Vatican to bestow church blessings on homosexuality, but Gramick and Nugent continued to work for what they considered the best hope for their legitimatization in the eyes of some church leaders: a discussion and dialogue about “homosexuality would at least acknowledge some of the recent data from the social sciences.”34 Despite Hickey’s constant interventions and Gramick and Nugent’s disassociation with NWM as co-directors, the two were still effective and could point to booked schedules of conferences, retreats, and publication deadlines to prove it. They continued to be operational in gay and lesbian ministry because they deliberately did not challenge church teachings and were able to keep delicate lines of communication and action transparent with many bishops and religious communities.

This was not the case with Dignity after 1987. Incensed by the 1986 “Letter to the Bishops” and subsequent eviction from church property, Dignity’s public position upholding revisionist sexual ethics and their frustration with the church became even more acute. Dignity’s leadership passed the “Miami Resolution” in July 1987, which blatantly upheld gay and lesbian physical sexual expression as “loving, life-giving, and life-affirming.”35 Even if sympathetic bishops wanted to support and work with Dignity, after the summer of 1987 they had to decline on the basis of the very public statement against church teachings. NWM filled in the spaces and dialogue where Dignity could not go or was not heard. Although they might have agreed with the “Miami Resolution,” if asked, Gramick and Nugent would have advised Dignity leaders to incorporate theological consultants into their statement and soften the language all the while being careful not to cross an ideological and political line.36 The bridges between gay and lesbian Catholics and the church seemed miles apart in the eyes of many, but NWM continued to work to domesticate the issue—putting homosexuality the forefront of theological and social justice discussions. The issue was everywhere. One could not pick up a Catholic magazine or newspaper (and many secular media publications) without reference to homosexuality and Catholic faith, be it affirmative or pejorative.

Gramick and Nugent constantly labored to convince church leaders and skeptical Catholics that not only was their reputation often unfairly maligned, but that their ministry was a
legitimate social justice cause. Archbishop Hickey’s accusation that Gramick and Nugent purported ambiguous church teaching followed the pair wherever they went. Their religious superiors and investigating committees could never point to something they had written or said that denied church teachings, nor did workshop participants complain of such. Their work was controversial, but not heretical. Nonetheless, Hickey’s ambition to terminate their ministry was all consuming. Between 1977 and 1988 with pressure from the CRSI, Gramick and Nugent’s religious communities conducted internal investigations three times. Beginning in 1981 Archbishop Hickey pressured Gramick and Nugent’s provincials to remove them from their respective religious communities. Their superiors kept producing positive evaluations but were actively exploring ways to relocate NWM to a more hospitable diocese while, more seriously, Gramick and Nugent considered leaving their communities to ease the pressure. By 1984 both Gramick and Nugent sought sabbaticals some distance from the Washington D.C. archdiocese in order to appease Hickey (and to take the pressure off their religious communities) but they both continued to work in pastoral and educational gay ministry.

In 1988 after several positive evaluations from their respective religious communities and after Gramick and Nugent had disassociated from the directorship of NWM, the Vatican’s Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life or CICLSAL (formally the CRSI) notified Fr. Malachy McBride, then the general superior of the Society of the Divine Savior and Sr. Patricia Flynn, formally apostolate director and provincial, then general superior of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, that it would conduct its own investigation by creating a commission headed by Bishop Adam J. Maida of Green Bay, Wisconsin, “to render a judgment as to the clarity and orthodoxy of the public presentations.” From 1988 to 1994, their superiors heard very little about the proceedings, and all assumed the case had been dropped.

The pace resumed in 1994. After a third meeting with the Maida Commission in June 1994 at the Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit, Gramick, Nugent, and their advisors came away feeling exhausted from the intense questioning and the pressure to remain on the defensive. Overall, they felt like their composure and responses were largely successful. That is until the Commission’s written account released in October 1994 revealed the Commission’s strong criticism and negative findings. The Vatican’s investigations into Gramick and Nugent’s gay and lesbian ministry endured for over a decade. CICLSAL relinquished the case to the CDF in 1995
(at first without Gramick, Nugent, or their superiors’ knowledge), implying to Gramick and Nugent’s superiors that in the final years of the investigation the charges had shifted from a focus on religious life and ministry to doctrinal issues. The CDF handles doctrinal matters and the issue was no longer about if Gramick and Nugent fairly represented church teachings on homosexuality (i.e. homosexual behavior), but about their own “internal conviction” about church teaching.

The whole process reeked of suspicious politics and blatantly lacked due process. Their superiors were not even aware of the CDF investigation until December 1997. With the help of cannon lawyers and theological advisors, Gramick and Nugent cooperated with the CDF’s demands, mostly providing qualifying statements about their own publications. It seemed as if a verdict had been determined before information had been gathered or those accused questioned.

In July 1999 the Vatican attempted to limit Gramick and Nugent’s ministry because the CDF accused Gramick and Nugent of advancing “doctrinely unacceptable positions” and officially charged them with promoting “ambiguous positions on homosexuality.” Hickey’s accusations now came from the Vatican. Gramick and Nugent had faithfully stated church teachings in their workshops and publications, but never did they personally state if they believed what the church taught. Their consciences were on trial. The CDF officially ordered Gramick and Nugent to end their work in gay and lesbian ministry and forbade them from speaking or writing about homosexuality or from discussing their punishment. The disciplinary action only legitimized their work on behalf of marginalized, voiceless people.

The CDF prohibited Gramick and Nugent from pastoral ministry with gay and lesbian Catholics—enraging their supports, the people they served, and a large segment of the American Catholic community. For Gramick and Nugent silence was not a strategic choice, but one forced on them after a decade-long investigation by ecclesiastical authorities. They were terrified what the unfair treatment and trials might mean to gay and lesbian Catholics and their families who were already struggling to reconcile with a church many considered punitive and unjust. If Gramick and Nugent were silenced, even more so would gay and lesbian Catholics. A NWM press release called on Gramick and Nugent’s religious orders to speak out and challenge church leaders. The NWM board pleaded for “particularly lesbian/gay people and their families NOT to walk away from the Church. In doing so, they will be imposing silence upon themselves, when what we all need is engaged discussion.” The imposed silencing resulted in a more acute vocal
critique of institutional church power experienced as repressive and disabling. How could Cardinal Ratzinger, the CDF, and larger institutional church not be “the enemy”?

As demonstrated in previous chapters, for years Gramick and Nugent evaded the Vatican’s interference with their social justice ministry through the protection of their autonomous religious congregations, political negotiations, strategic, selective choices to wait out or ignore the Roman curia’s suggestions, and affirmation that their ministry was needed. Throughout the proceedings with the CDF, Gramick, Nugent, and their superiors’ responses differed. Gramick and Nugent interpreted their silence and CDF rulings in dissimilar ways due to their distinct places as sister and a priest in church life. For instance, by May 2000 School Sisters of Notre Dame leaders exhausted options to avoid Vatican interference. They complied with the CDF ruling prohibiting Gramick from speaking about gay ministry, but her superiors and fellow sisters must have been prepared for Gramick’s reaction and response. Over a decade prior Gramick wrote about her loyalty to the School Sisters and her commitment to authentic renewal in her community, albeit with a caveat for a way out. The sister wrote, “Although as a woman religious I am identified with church institutions, in the final analysis, God, not any institution is paramount. To associate with and to preserve any structure at the expense of serving God and humankind is idolatry. To follow God’s call rather than an institutional call, if the two are in conflict, is a moral imperative. I pray always for the grace and the insight to discern God’s call.”

Nugent, Gramick, and their superiors attempted several times to make concessions and compromise with the Vatican, but their ignored appeals often ended in frustrated protest. Despite years of careful work and remaining within the boundaries church teachings, the pair felt condemned. Prior to the silencing the CDF drew up a Profession of Faith to be signed by Nugent. Upon reading, Nugent “immediately realized that there was no way” he could sign it. Instead the priest composed a Profession of Faith that he was willing to sign. Nugent upheld church teaching while infusing more pastoral language into his profession, specifically abdicating the language of “intrinsically evil.” His concession failed to win approval and the punishment of silence was handed down to both of them. Nugent reluctantly complied with the decision in order to remain in his religious order and the priesthood. He eventually retreated to parish work in Pennsylvania where through “silence” he could continue to minister.
Gramick creatively ignored the CDF and challenged School Sisters of Notre Dame’s compliance by continuing to speak not only about gay ministry but also about what she considered unjust and unfair accusations by Vatican officials.\textsuperscript{46} “I made a decision to comply with notification,” stated Gramick, “but rationalized it to myself by saying I would comply but not passively, but actively and try to change that decision.”\textsuperscript{47} With the support of friends and allies and pledging to follow her own conscience, in defiance Gramick toured the country speaking to Catholic and ecumenical audiences about the investigation and asked them to help her “find a collaborative way to reverse the Vatican decision.”\textsuperscript{48} In a statement released by Gramick on account of her censoring, she compared her unjust silence and emotional persecution to that of a battered woman: a “violation of the basic human right to self-defense” and church law.\textsuperscript{49} She likened her fear throughout the Vatican investigation as a type of oppression experienced by thousands of gay and lesbian voices silenced by insensitive leadership.\textsuperscript{50} The sister found herself in a liminal state when she defied the Vatican’s orders but her religious congregation had yet to intervene to stop her either.

Eventually the School Sisters had to comply and reluctantly dismiss Sr. Gramick. She transferred to a new religious community, the Kentucky-based Sisters of Loretto (a community with a long history of social justice commitments), in order to continue speaking and ministering. Technically the CDF handed down the order not to “speak or write about homosexuality or the Vatican investigation” when Gramick’s ministry fell under the jurisdiction of the School Sister of Notre Dame.\textsuperscript{51} She could transfer religious orders and theoretically null the charges. The Vatican could investigate and intervene again and pressure Loretto leadership to silence the sister, but this was a risk the community was willing to undertake.\textsuperscript{52} In 2002 NWM led its fifth national symposium with the theme “Out of Silence God has Called Us.”\textsuperscript{53}

**Challenging the Silence**

Is the history of Gramick, Nugent and New Ways Ministry simply another example of renewal and reform in contemporary Catholic life stifled by an authoritarian, conservative church? Such overly simplistic models of power as dominated by hierarchical control suppressing alternative voices within American Catholicism overlook narratives of resistance and assumptions of powerlessness. A totalizing critique should be avoided and a careful and restrained critique presented, but one does wonder if alternative narratives are possible. Yes they are, but historians need to be mindful not to celebrate transgression or subversion by focusing too
attentively on domination. At the opposite end of the spectrum, historians often feel the need to grant liberation in what seems to be oppressive events, but I want to be careful not to jump to such sanguine conclusions. This narrative of NWM and the Catholic community it inspired does contribute to our understanding of religion as a cultural force that constitutes meaning and identities and how diverse groups of people within a tradition create and resist structures of authority.

Their story is unique because of their long-term success as opposed to other outspoken Catholics who were swiftly censored. Gramick and Nugent were radical in the eyes of many, but in Nugent’s words, they were “flaming moderates,” and this in-between status is what made them dangerous in the eyes of detractors. They were strategic moderates and careful to negotiate within the boundaries of their religious communities and larger church structure all the while critiquing power structures. The bureaucracy, politics, and hierarchy would weigh on anyone. Their ministry was energizing because it was cutting edge and also meeting the needs of Catholics–perhaps also because it was also a bit dangerous and unique. Unlike most biblical prophets, they were not reluctant to be the bearers of a prophetic message. Gramick, Nugent, and their supporters volunteered, but their success and hardships still had religious significance.

Reformers like Gramick and Nugent interpret their personal histories and experiences working with gay and lesbian Catholics within a distinctive theological worldview. The story is not simply about politics and strategy, but about a complex diverse Catholic Church after the Vatican Council and two individuals whose ministry exemplified the confusion. They experimented with renewal in religious life and new forms of apostolates but were also part of a culture in the midst of a gay and lesbian liberation movement. There were few rules about how religious were to proceed. Gramick and Nugent managed to combine the most controversial and debated elements about what the postconciliar church should be and whom it represents. They challenged what it meant to provide pastoral care, what could be counted as a social justice cause, and how to remain a unified church despite so much diversity. These issues collided with the extensive issue of modern sexuality that had been long ignored by the church.

The pertinent inquiry should not be about why they stayed in the church or why they did not leave Catholic life (as so many have asked), but more about how their religious faith constituted their meanings and identities in the world. This community of Catholics does not answer “what it means to be Catholic” except that means to always be in the process of figuring
out what “being Catholic is.” In this sense Catholic identities are submerged in ideas about sex and gender. Sexual and religious identities negotiated through a web of institutional and social structures produced a unique niche in postconciliar American Catholic life—reconciling identities that reconcile to always be reconciliation. Gramick and Nugent did not understand power as repressive or disabling. Instead they contextualized power in reverse hierarchies. They believed in God’s domain the weak would become strong and the persecuted liberated. Joining an emerging community of progressive Catholics, they lived what Johann Baptist calls a “political theology,” alerting people to the power of oppression and dedicating ministries to changing society through their understanding of God’s liberating love.57

Their reconciling ministry continued for over three decades despite institutional pressure. Gramick and Nugent’s educational and pastoral efforts were still in high demand through the late 1980s and through most of the 1990s (even after the 1999 ruling). The message to offer compassion, fight discrimination, and side with the marginalized remained pertinent. Gramick and Nugent’s progressive, liberal program for social reform that stressed inclusion, equality, and attacked homophobia continued to make sense to many Christians. Others still worried Gramick and Nugent were overly accommodating and differential to church authority. This is a common critique that likewise applies to contemporary LGBT religious reform movements within various denominations that attempt to work within their religious traditions and religious assemblies. The point is to creatively “stay in” and struggle to be recognized within their tradition while outsiders see the struggle as pointless. Some faith traditions are more successful at this than others. The United Church of Christ and the Episcopalian congregants are split over issues of homosexuality, but the leadership of these denominations has taken bold steps toward inclusion. Still, other LGBT Christians are marginalized and forced to organize outside of denominational oversight (Southern Baptists or Pentecostals for example).

Theologian Mary McClintock Fulkerson fears these justice-minded, inclusive Christians come dangerously close to denying difference by failing to challenge the heterosexual as real.58 In other words, progressive Christians focus so intensively on promoting a culture and language of inclusion to resist homophobia, especially in conversations about sexual identities (typically classified as heterosexual or homosexual), that multiple genders are “not easily imagined.”59 Like many Christian LGBT reform groups, Gramick and Nugent embrace an essentialist understanding of sexuality: sexuality as not chosen, but god-given, and most importantly, a
fundamental component of what it means to be human. For Gramick and Nugent persons are foremost spiritual beings but also sexed subjects with sexual identities. They developed a discourse of inclusion, rights, and equality limited and determined by a constructing discourse that made no room for deviance. An extended discussion of bisexuality, transgender or transsexual persons had no place in public discussion. NWM’s simple acknowledgement of non-heterosexual orientations and gay and lesbian persons was a radical public acknowledgement compared to the church’s homophobic history.

Gramick and Nugent adapted secular, assimilationist strategies adopted by the homophile movement and the early stages of the gay liberation movement. Likewise, they used progressive, liberal models for ministry (pastoral care, education, legal reform, and coalition building) in hopes of challenging the church’s traditional teachings on sexuality that ignored the experiences, human dignity, and worth of gay and lesbian Catholics and their contributions to the church. Success was not measured by insurgent, disruptive protest but by small steps and gradual progress. Gramick and Nugent carved a niche in postconciliar Catholic life for more than three decades while the larger gay and lesbian movement morphed into various forms and combinations of rights initiatives, protests, responses to the AIDS epidemic, and emerging queer experiments. Despite these changes, Gramick and Nugent’s work endured largely because their moderate ministry remained consistent and narrowly focused on the struggle for sexual equality and maintained a faithful vision of social justice. Their protest was famed in terms of negotiating the embodied institutional and structural forms of power built into Catholic culture.

Queering Catholic Religious History

Many gay and lesbian rights advocates assuming Gramick and Nugent were inadequately political criticized NWM for its presumed obliging stance to church authorities. Gramick and Nugent were highly aware of their situatedness in church politics. They did not take an “in your face” approach as others had chosen to do as they felt their actions could be more subversive (and beneficial) from working within church structure and power. It would seem that Gramick and Nugent’s hope in linear progress, dependence on dialogue, and their utopian social vision would be the antithesis of a contemporary understanding of what means to participate in queer politics. They did not deconstruct identity politics through exercises in postmodern theory and praxis, nor did they challenge what they thought to be the “god-givenness” of sexuality and sexual difference. To the point, Gramick and Nugent never self-identified as queer or even
named the people they worked with as queer. Yet Gramick and Nugent were doing queer work and at times could be considered queer subjects.

NWM, Gramick, and Nugent give us glimpses into the ways sexual identities were constructed and produced in postconciliar American Catholic life, while helping us understand the ways in which sexuality (and to an extent gender) ordered and legislated so much of Catholic life. Lesbian and gay religious movements require theorists and historians to rethink what it means to be queer and create queer space. In the most abstract sense, “queer” evades definition because theoretically queer is a process and praxis of becoming. It is to “foul up” what society deems normal and natural. Granted there is no monolithic understanding or definition of queer theory but rather a variety of theoretical and interdisciplinary approaches that work to destabilize what it means to be queer.

Annamarie Jagose affirms queer theory developed “out of a specifically lesbian and gay reworking of post-structuralism figuring of identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable position.” She admonishes readers that “queer” as a theoretical project should not be taken as a synonym for “lesbian and gay.” Queer theorists emerged by engaging in several strands of postmodern thought, particularly theory and action in response to AIDS. It is a theoretical and political paradigm that deconstructs identity markers, including sexual and religious labels, and as an abstract, fluid phenomenon queer theory resists the normative and thus evades definition. While typically applied in discourses about gender and sexuality, theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick pointed out over a decade ago that queer “also encompasses dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these and other identity-constituting and identity-fracturing discourses.” I would add that religion and sexuality are at the epicenter of the criss-cross in the later decades of the 20th century.

More often than not reforming religious movements such as NWM intentionally ignored multiple sexualities, such as bisexual and transgender, and pragmatically focused their political and theological energies on same-sex desire (while also glossing over how sexual identities intersect with racial, ethnic, and social-class identities). NWM espouses a progressive sexual ethic unlike other facets of the church. In reference to the inclusive visions espoused by LGBT religious groups, theologian Christina Hutchins has pointed out that the reinforcement of essentialist positions and binary categories (homo/hetero) could stifle potential for rupture and
ambiguity. I propose, however, Gramick and Nugent use binaries and dualisms (some would say ambiguity) already found in conciliar and postconciliar Catholic teaching (pastoral/authoritarian, opacity/transparency, love/hate, orientation/behavior) to create spaces for clever negotiation and resistance. As Timothy G. McCarthy and others writing on Vatican II have enumerated, conciliar documents reflect inconsistencies, different emphases, and compromises as resulting from the clash between traditional and progressive positions during the council and afterwards. At the heart of many the bishop’s debates was what it meant to be a pastoral church, and the same tension carried through to conversations and teachings on sexual ethics in the 1970s and 1980s. When the church declared sexual orientation (including homosexuality) as intrinsic to a person but same-sex sexual expression as evil, it not only created what many would consider a damaging violent separation of orientation and acts, but also an ambiguous, gray area open to various interpretations for which Gramick and Nugent used to their advantage. They could assert with confidence and integrity that they were not guilty of ambiguous teaching on sexual ethics because the ambiguity was built into religious renewal, church teachings, and theological debates.

As progressive Catholics Gramick and Nugent do not fit within a traditionalist ideology or are acknowledged by the more conservative church tradition, but neither have they fully rejected tradition for an autonomous, gay-specific group. They are radical (and perhaps even queer) in the sense that they do not share the traditional, conservative ideology professed by influential magisterial authorities and thus at times could be considered on the margins of the mainstream church. They do not fit into obvious queer paradigms either. “Catholic and gay?” The fused identities are incongruous for many queer activists who reject religious traditions, especially given the homophobic and heteronormative history of the church. Persons claiming religious and sexual identities are also antithetical to some queer projects. At the other end of the spectrum, the terms are incongruous to Catholic traditionalists who want to deny the existence of gay and lesbian persons.

Instead Gramick and Nugent identify as those who embrace a specific Catholic religious identity characterized by what they consider to be the prophetic, activist, appropriate, and transformative vision of the church in the modern world. It is an ideal, utopian vision constructed by religious faith and a social vision of radical inclusion. Their vision is also a collective, essentialist understanding about human worth and dignity. Theologian Mary McClintock
Fulkerson worries this type of political, social, and religious vision, “relies upon transcendental acts.”

Gramick and Nugent like other social justice groups did rely on God’s intervention in their lives and in the lives of those with whom they worked. Their God is a God oriented towards the future who offers a theology of hope.

Obviously they had religious vocations—devoting their lives to God’s service in ministry—and they did not wait around for divine intervention, as there was too much work to do. These ambiguities characterize the work of NWM as anomalous and hegemonic at the same time. Bumping up against the contact zones of innovation and tradition, these Catholics create queer spaces and hybrid identities. They simultaneously work within assimilationist models and champion liberatory visions for social, individual, and religious transformation. In Gramick’s article “Changing Hierarchical Structures,” she claims that church hierarchy should not be abolished despite her obvious disagreements with the Roman curia and a handful of bishops. Such a stance may seem accommodating, but she also envisions a human and pastoral church with sympathetic, reforming, servant leaders, which constitutes a boldly envisioned future requiring massive structural change.

Instead of escaping the dualisms such as the tradition/innovation or orientation/behavior divide, Gramick and Nugent located themselves in the intersections of the constructedness by muddling the assumed differential between the powerful and powerless. Rather than transcending binaries Gramick and Nugent positioned themselves in the middle of tension, realizing their identities and power were contingent on their locale in church structure. They considered themselves very much a part of the church. “Staying in” was the only option. Their life work and ministry was defined by a religious vocation to work with and on behalf of gay and lesbian Catholics. NWM maintained the gray area in Catholic sexual ethics in order to empower individuals to follow their consciences while growing in their love of God and love of neighbor. The divide between official church statements and what Catholics were actually doing was particularly acute in the sensitive area of sexuality, and Gramick and Nugent understood the complicated pragmatic negotiations in the lives of gay and lesbian Catholics and their families.

Reform-minded Catholic groups and individuals attempting to work within institutional structures, however, did and still do not fit neatly under the rubric of “queer.” They did challenge conventional notions of what it meant to be Catholic, and traditionalists blamed them for “fouling up” Catholic identities. If queer is something beyond identity, or an ethic that suspends
the demand for self-identity and complete coherence, gay and lesbian practicing Catholics and ministries do not fit into queer paradigms because they most likely adopt an understanding of a personal sexual identity as biological determinism in natural terms. This community of Catholics did create queer space to negotiate their identities.

**Sexy or Sexless?**

Their social justice emphasis influenced by a tinge of liberation theology and identity politics required the pair to categorize who could be considered marginalized, oppressed people. Gramick and Nugent had preferential treatment for gays and lesbians rejected by the church and hoped to mobilize a substantial constituency into grassroots action and protests to fight homophobia. But Gramick and Nugent also resisted singling out sexual identities, preferring to use the language of personhood that included not only sexual but spiritual dimensions. Nugent reminded readers that the terms “gay” and “homosexual” should be adjectives “first and foremost” because “they always modify human persons.” Gramick and Nugent brought attention to homosexual identities at the same time they professed human beings were more than their sexuality. Gay and lesbian Catholics were foremost human beings with spiritual potential and beings loved by God. Religious identities (even those with religious vocations) were not fixed but continually changing, growing, and expanding upon what it meant to be Catholic. Gerald D. Coleman, S.S. rector and President of St. Patrick’s Seminary agreed with Gramick and Nugent that a “person is more than their sexual preference.” This idea is complicated by the fact that Gramick and Nugent’s ministry existed to serve a minority group of people categorized by their sexual identities. They ministered to wounded lesbian and gay persons and their families hurt by the church in hopes they could be reconciled with the church.

NWM’s co-directors offered a utopian vision of church renewal. It was a social vision in which gender, sexual, and religious identities did not matter in their dream of collectively overturning oppressive, authoritarian social structures of the church dependent on their radical, liberating vision of God’s power. Gramick and Nugent’s social vision moved beyond the importance of claiming (or coming to terms with) sexual identities to imagining more inclusive religious identities and communities where sexual orientations and behavior are irrelevant for creating Catholic community. The ultimate goal for NWM was to slowly fade out because its services would no longer be needed. Ironically, while expressing a vision of a future in which identities did not matter, Gramick and Nugent employed identity politics by organizing around
and for an oppressed sexual minority. Gramick and Nugent also had a wider vision: a person was more than sexuality—they were foremost individuals with spiritual potential who perhaps express a desire to re-embrace a Catholic religiosity with a church offering compassion and justice.

Throughout their careers Gramick and Nugent strategically concealed the sexiness of the subject—sexuality. In many cases they made sexuality a non-issue, or at least a secondary issue to personal spiritual development, social justice, and their vision of a non-discriminatory future. They dreamed of a future church in which sexuality and gender did not matter. Theorists argue there is danger in this transcendent hope because it fails to rupture or destabilize identities. This vision of inclusivity glosses over needed differences, especially sex and gender variances beyond binary categories. At the same time Gramick and Nugent flourished because they were different. Their marginal status and work exemplified the radical apostolate—edgy and literally sexy. They challenged what it meant to cultivate neighborly solidarity as outlined by the conciliar document *Gaudium et Spes*, and they were at the vanguard of experimenting in unconventional ministry during the decades following Vatican II. Gramick and Nugent pushed the limits of what it meant to “do ministry,” but they also needed traditional ideologies and conventional ways of doing ministry to push against. The pair would sustain in gay ministry only if their services and messages were needed. In a similar vein, the queer activist whose protest fouls up normative sex and gender identities exists only when there are recognized normative values to foul up, to resist, and to destabilize.

Gay and lesbian Catholics, families, religious, and ministries that supported them are queer not in the sense that they fully reject normative models of identity and sexuality, but queer when to an extent they repudiate the typical individualistic, destabilizing paradigm of queer protest in favor of a broader, utopian belief and vision of human connectedness, inclusiveness, and justice. The church’s postconciliar imperative urging Catholics to bring justice to the modern world allowed NWM to combine assimilationist, liberal approaches and radical, utopian visions for social change that were mutually constituted within the wider church’s vision. This public, activist view of a living theology dedicated to lessening social sin fostered movements like NWM whose directors devoted their time and energies to interpreting the social order and critiquing humankind’s place in that order. They were not naïve in their understanding of politics, risk, and challenges that accompanied their prophetic ministry.
A variety of Catholics and many queer theorists might find resistance through more private subversive actions, such as negotiating power with silence. After all, the monastic and seminary institutions had kept same-sex desire and love silent for centuries, refusing to recognize it or even name it, thus allowing the unspoken protection, seclusion, and power. NWM was more cautious and private when it came to working with lesbian or gay religious, but as demonstrated in Chapter One, their ministry among lesbian religious challenged the silence surrounding a taboo subject (or a paradigm not even considered for much of church history: sexual nuns?). It was NWM public work and publications that made them different from other Catholic ministries but—as explored in chapters three and four—also suspicious and threatening to some church leaders. “The ministry that one does on a private level seems to be unhampered,” commented Gramick, “but as soon as you work in a ministry that is very public, then the rocks begin to be hurled.” Both Gramick and Nugent’s provincials and general superiors were able to deflect attacks or “catch the rocks” for most of their ministry through creative political maneuvering. At times they also wished the pair would be more cautious and discreet.

Although Gramick and Nugent were committed to public awareness and education, they recognized greater visibility did not come without risks. A priest acquaintance reminded those working on behalf of gays and lesbians that ministry “in this generation involves both risk and mystery.” Risk came from the conservative leadership who viewed their ministry as too progressive and radical, and risk came from the critiques of Catholics who felt they were “too deferential to the magisterium.” Caught in the tension Gramick and Nugent also desired to remain in collegial, positive relationships with their respective religious communities while remaining accountable to those whom they minister.

Opposition to gay ministry, Gramick, Nugent, and NWM will never vanish, and there will never be a moment when Gramick and Nugent “win.” Like the story of renewal and struggle in women’s religious communities as described by Lora Ann Quinonez, CDP and Mary Daniel Turner, SNDdeN, Gramick and Nugent did not seek to score points with their ecclesiastical opposition, but “win” by upholding personal dignity, speaking truth, respecting individual conscience, and practicing non-violence in conflicting times. They tapped into exercising their moral agency, sliced through dichotomies, and pledged to “continue to seek ways to negotiate carefully the choppy waters of the ecclesiastical sees.” In faith they portray a prophetic imagination by calling for the institutional church to be accountable to the people it serves.
In the final decades of the 20th century sexuality and gender identities were notably in flux in both broader American culture and the American Catholic Church. Catholic gays and lesbians joined the gay liberation movement proclaiming “gay is good” and critiqued institutions—including the church—that were progenitors of homophobic sentiments. At the same time religious professionals experimented with postconciliar reforms in both religious life and ministry. Influenced by the feminist movement and social justice currents within the church, many religious professionals struggled to define what it meant to be Catholic and how to serve the people of the church in the modern world. They embraced religious life as a prophetic vocation but had to maneuver the political and social realities when instituting an inclusive future. A considerable number of Catholics turned to resources in the behavioral sciences to locate their positioning within social structures and to better understand how cultural factors such as race and sexuality impacted those whom they worked with and among. In the process these heuristic tools led them to question their own sexuality and body. Uniquely positioned as chaste religious professionals between lay Catholics and upper levels of church hierarchy, sisters like Jeannine Gramick and priests like Robert Nugent carved out a unconventional niche connecting seemingly unrelated cultures: the American gay and lesbian movement and the American Catholic Church. To understand their queer position between these contested, but overlapping, cultures is to complicate what it meant for Catholics to be creatively engaged in their tradition in the later era of the 20th century.
Indeed, there “arose a good deal of ferment in Catholic circles between 1975 and 1985 around the issue of homosexuality.”1 Through the auspices of New Ways Ministry, Sr. Gramick and Fr. Nugent worked to set a pastoral, inclusive tone when it came to the controversial issue of homosexuality and the church. Gramick and Nugent coincidentally met over a shared interest to minister to the outcast in Philadelphia and subsequently worked together for several decades. They were both independent thinkers, well read, dedicated to social justice ministry, and exposed to people and ideas outside of traditional Catholic clerical and religious life during formative years in their religious vocations. More importantly, joining a larger community of progressive Catholics, they both interpreted a particular vision of a pastoral church in the decades following the Second Vatican Council. The need for this vision was especially pressing post-Vatican II because like gay Catholics undergoing religious and sexual identity crises, the church, in Timothy McCarthy’s words, was “attempting to articulate a clear sense of its own identity and mission.”2 Disagreements over renewal in religious life, Catholic social teaching, magisterial authority, and primacy of the individual conscience were factors that contributed to the confusion contesting what it meant to be Catholic. These issues climaxed in debates about sexual morality and sexual identity in postconciliar American Catholic life.

Like other religious professionals experimenting with what it meant to “do ministry” Gramick and Nugent exemplified new ways to minister. With regards to the Vatican II document Perfectae Caritatis (Decree on the Appropriate Renewal in Religious Life, 1965) and stirrings of experimentation in the decade prior, such as the Sister Formation Conference contributing to the education of sisters or liturgical reform in some priestly circles, Gramick and Nugent were literally products of this untried period that redefined their vocations as prophetic and countercultural. They were part of religious renewal more sensitive to the needs and experiences of the people with whom they worked, subsequently developing ministries to stigmatized groups.

Vatican II documents did not specifically address social sin. By the 1970s, however, in light of war and peace protests, racial tension, and the woman’s movement, the contemporary Catholic social ethic had been reconfigured. Articulated ideals about social reform and social justice were firmly planted into the American conscience and subsequently American Catholic
consciences. Catholic social justice initiatives built upon official documents such as *Gaudium et Spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 1965) and the bishop synod’s statement *Justicia in Mundo* (*Justice in the World*, 1971). The central tenet of Catholic social thought emphasized the human dignity and worth of individuals. With regard to values of human dignity, many Catholics believed the church had a special advocate role to guarantee human rights. Catholics critiqued power regimes that exploited persons and neglected subcultures. Bishops urged Catholics to work together on missions to protect oppressed individuals and groups from exploitation.

While many Catholics critiqued abusive power structures and governments in Third World countries and in their own cities, tensions mounted over the exercise of authority within the institutional church. Religious communities and clerical councils experimented with collegial models of shared power while the hierarchical magisterium was reluctant to loosen control. Building upon a long history of conflict between monarchical models and democratic models of religious authority (especially evident in American Catholic history), progressivists clashed with traditionalists over the administrative role of the Roman curia as well as the power of bishops in fulfilling the disputed mission of the church. In the decades following Vatican II, stress increased between the hierarchical magisterium (pope and bishops) and some members of the scholarly magisterium (theologians) over issues of public dissent. Traditionalists feared lay participation theological debates and sought to remove these discussions from the public sphere. Others fearing the heavy-handedness of hierarchical moral authority advocated the importance of dialogue and the individual’s primacy of conscience.

Gramick and Nugent’s gay-positive ministry contributed to a particular progressive vision of the modern church. This community of Catholics served a church that reached the needy, overlooked, and destitute, while recognizing the human worth and dignity in persons ignored by society. Women religious worked on race relations and civil rights initiatives. Some traveled to South America to relieve refugees suffering under repressive regimes, some fed the hungry, and still others organized peace protests. During the years of experimentation following Vatican II, Catholics also found themselves amidst a rising feminist movement and burgeoning sexual revolution. For Gramick and Nugent a new type of outcast was suffering at the hands of a prejudicial society, the homosexual. Even more heartbreaking for the young sister and father was when they discovered that the church participated in the discrimination. They labored to reverse
the church’s homophobic role in history and believed reconciliation was possible, even if the meaning and understanding of reconciliation changed over the years.

Nugent had a life-long learning of books and scholarship, and Gramick was a trained educator in the School Sisters of Notre Dame charism; thus, they incorporated NWM as an educational ministry to the non-gay and gay community. Workshops and retreats were established popular forums in Catholic life, and Gramick and Nugent offered a new type of workshop: a sociological, psychological, and theological education on homosexuality. While the topic was controversial, their public message was decidedly moderate. Through workshops and retreats, they challenged the silence that stifled discussions, understandings, and debates about homosexuality and the church. The ultimate goal for Gramick and Nugent was not only to reconcile gay and lesbian Catholics with the church, but also to inspire grassroots social reform for a more inclusive church and society. The reality of living out that goal was messy and not black and white as Gramick and Nugent situated themselves between gay and lesbian Catholics and the Vatican. Like and lesbian Catholics struggling to reconcile their religious and sexual identities, Gramick and Nugent fashioned their own hybrid identities living in the tensions between a series of binary opposites.

What did it mean to be Catholic in the latter decades of the 20th century? It meant to live in an era when sexuality (and to an extent gender) were so much in flux, not to mention most other aspects of Catholic life, ministry, and religiosity. Gramick and Nugent located themselves in the middle of the divisiveness. They danced between orthodoxy and reform, magisterial and pastoral teachings, liberal and radical visions of the future, opaque and transparent church politics, while loving the church but also suffering at the hands of the church. While they sought to reconcile the dichotomies in their own lives and ministry, they also recognized that resolution was not going to come. Modeling their lives on Jesus, understood as the wounded healer and reconciler, they too experienced alienation and rejection. Gramick and Nugent embraced the suffering on behalf of those they considered oppressed but had faith in the mystery of God’s reconciling and liberating love.

The story of Gramick, Nugent, and New Ways Ministry is important for the study of American religious history and for scholars of LBGT history. To historicize gay, lesbian, and religious identities is to understand the ferment over homosexuality and the church. The narrative moves a small step closer to piecing together the complex history of postconciliar
American Catholic life in which Catholics were creatively engaged with their tradition. This story does not, however, cover the entire range of postconciliar religious experience or gay and lesbian existence in American Catholic culture. Future studies might seek to sharpen and complicate the story at the diocesan level. What type of dioceses initiated their own gay and lesbian-positive ministries and why? What was the role of the bishop? Did participants advertise or conceal their existence? Did relationships exist with Dignity chapters? Most importantly, how do these grassroots efforts and varied understandings of human sexuality inform scholars about a diverse American church?

My study invites scholars of LGBT history to incorporate Catholic gay and lesbian ministry into a broader narrative of LGBT religious movements and LGBT history. It is my hope that my narrative will be one of many that contributes to a fuller history. For instance, Dignity chapters in Philadelphia and Boston have been sites of recent sociological and ethnographic analysis, shedding light on why lesbian and gay Catholics remain within Catholicism and how they affirm their spiritual value. Historians have yet to situate national and local Dignity histories in relationship to the secular gay and lesbian movement. Additionally, a more refined analysis of the particular conflicts (debates over feminist issues, racial diversity, shared leadership, sexual promiscuity, leather communities, AIDS, queer identities, among others) within Dignity communities would provide an alternative context for assimilationist, liberal, and queer politics within the broader gay and lesbian community.

Beyond institutional histories of Catholic gay and lesbian movements or studies of local Dignity chapters and lay Catholics, more sophisticated analyses of religious professionals’ understandings and experiences of human sexuality are needed. Anecdotal evidence about gay seminarians and the current sexual abuse scandals will complicate the endeavor (if not shed light onto confused sexual bodies within clerical culture), but there are articulate gay priests, gay brothers, and lesbian sisters whose stories “break” the supposed silence. Celibate clerics and religious complicate modern understandings of sexual identity, orientation, and behavior. Such studies would continue to raise questions about public and private boundaries within Catholic culture, and investigators would seriously need to question if the private (sexual?) lives of gay priests or lesbian sisters should be public knowledge.

Catholic communities organized by Gramick and Nugent critiqued the church’s homophobic role in history, creating a moral vocabulary to talk about homosexuality and the
church in the latter decades of the 20th century. The investigation into Gramick, Nugent, New Ways Ministry, their supporters, and detractors “fouls up” the supposed silence surrounding same-sex love.
APPENDIX A

Copy of “Use of Human Subjects in Research” Approval Form

Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2763
(850) 644-8633 · FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 10/21/2005

To: Howell Williams
927 E. Jefferson St
Tallahassee, FL 32301

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
Negotiating the Choppy Waters of Ecclesiasticism: Queering Catholic Religious Reform Movements

The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Human Subjects Committee at its meeting on 8/10/2005. Your project was approved by the Committee.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals which may be required.

If the project has not been completed by 8/9/2006 you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. The principal investigator must promptly report, in writing, any unexpected problems causing risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols of such investigations as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The Assurance Number is IRB000000446.

cc: John Corian
HSC No. 2005-608
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

Dear _________________________,

My name is Howell Williams and I am a doctoral student in American religious history at Florida State University. Currently, I am conducting dissertation research on Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) religious movements of the 1960s through early 1980s in order to contribute to the larger story of American religious cultural history. My particular interest is Catholic gay and lesbian reconciling ministries, such as New Ways Ministry, and their involvement in social justice and human rights campaigns of the 1970s. I believe that the story of Catholic LGBT religious movements is a vital and interesting piece of postconciliar Catholic history and the larger story of 20th century American religious history that has been overlooked. My goal is to piece together the narrative of exactly who was talking about and organizing around the issues of sexuality, why, and what were the main goals of reconciling groups like New Ways Ministry.

Your participation will involve consent to oral history interviews in order to supplement archival research. Interviews will be scheduled at interviewee’s convenience. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty and all records will be destroyed.

If requested, anonymity will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms. The researcher, Howell Williams, is the only person who will have access to notes, documentation, transcripts and audio recordings. Portions of the interview, including your name, or if anonymity was requested, your pseudonym, may be published in the dissertation or future academic publications.

There are foreseeable risks or discomforts to you if you agree to participate in the study. The possible risks are the publication of aspects of your religious, spiritual, and professional history, publication of your involvement in LGBT religious movements, and the disclosure of your sexual orientation and behavior.

If you have any questions or concerns, I can be reached at the following:

Howell Williams
Department of Religion
Dodd Hall, 107
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-1520
(850)-443-6371
HowellWilliams@yahoo.com

Advisor: Dr. John Corrigan
(850) 644-8094
Please check the line that applies to your consent and sign and date below.

___ I give my consent to participate in the above study and have my responses published. I agree to release my name. My name and responses can appear in dissertation publication and/or future academic publication. I understand that I will be tape recorded or videotaped by the researcher. These tapes will be kept by the researcher in a locked filing cabinet. I understand that only the researcher will have access to these tapes and that they will destroyed by Jan. 1, 2020.

___ I give my consent to participate in the above study and have my responses published. I do not agree to release my name. My name cannot appear in dissertation publication and/or future academic publication, but my information can appear under a pseudonym. Information obtained during the course of the study will remain anonymous to the extent allowed by law. I understand that I will be tape recorded or videotaped by the researcher. These tapes will be kept by the researcher in a locked filing cabinet. I understand that only the researcher will have access to these tapes and that they will destroyed by Jan. 1, 2020.

Printed Name:__________________________________________________________

________________________

Signature:____________________________________________________________

Date:________________________
NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 Please note that I used the term “homosexual Catholics” interchangeably with gay and lesbian Catholics depending on how sources of the period used it. I realize that terms such as “gay rights” would be better termed “gay and lesbian rights” or “gay Catholics” would be more aptly labeled “LGBT Catholics.” I understand that currently the adjectives gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, and queer are often used in lieu of “homosexual” to describe sexual identities. However, I chose to use my sources’ terminology in order to trace the development in language and awareness when dealing with LGBTQ issues. I will be using the term “homosexual” to describe a sexual orientation more often in this paper in order to represent the language of my sources. The term “gay” also appears in the literature typically to mean both lesbian and gay unless otherwise noted as “gay male.”

2 Gramick and Nugent advocated renewal and reform. McCarthy distinguishes between the two in The Catholic Tradition. He suggests renewal revives traditions while reform involves changes and corrections. Gramick and Nugent’s rhetoric stressed renewal while they proposed and activated reform. McCarthy’s reminder is helpful, “…while reform involves changes and corrections, the changes that take place within a given frame of reference and do not change the church’s self-understanding.” Timothy G. McCarthy, The Catholic Tradition: Before and After Vatican II 1878-1993 (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1993), 72.


6 I am grateful for Amy Koehlinger’s assistance as an articulate conversation partner and her willingness to help me frame this era as a “golden age.” In the early stages of this project while I was knee-deep in applications for dissertation grants, Dr. Koehlinger helped me focus and articulate the parameters.

7 For instance, these ministries included work with and on behalf of racial minorities, prisoners, drug addicts, and the homeless.

8 For a general overview of assimilationist approaches to politics and social change by gay and lesbian groups, see Nikki Sullivan, A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 22-26.


13 The notion of queer spaces is explored in detail in Chapter 5. I however, use this term loosely as a metaphor to name the space of resistance negotiated by Gramick and Nugent. “Queer space” has been a popular topic for theorists over the last decade as many architects and designers turn their attention to creating and analyzing literal, physical queer space. I use this term more metaphorically. See David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds., *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1995), Nancy Duncan, ed. *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Sex and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1996), and Michael P. Brown, *Closet Space: Geographies of Metaphor from the Body to the Globe* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

14 A more detailed explanation of queer theory and queer politics can be found in Chapter 5.

15 Nikki Sullivan points out that belief in a common humanity is a trait of assimilationist groups. See Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, 23.


20 Interestingly, religious studies scholars who investigate conservative and fundamentalist religious movements or peoples using ethnographic methods have been critiqued for appearing too sympathetic to their subjects. Some examples include: R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the

What makes NWM an interesting case study is that it combines scholarship on women religious and priests. Although each has a different and unique status in the church, Gramick and Nugent shared much in common and were shaped by conciliar Catholic culture. Part of this project involves parsing out factors that contributed to their distinct statuses in church but also demonstrating how their separate roles combined to make their gay ministry a surprisingly successful ministry for over 30 years.

The writings on Catholic moral theology and sexual ethics fill entire library shelves. This project does not ignore these contributions, but is simply limited in scope to writings on gay and lesbian religious movements. However, a limited discussion of ethics and discussion of moral theology is included.

In some Catholic literature homosexual sexual behavior and expression is referred to as “homogenital acts.”

Others include Consultation on Homosexuality and Justice and Roman Catholic Theology and National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries.


The Second Vatican Council (or Vatican II) convened from fall 1962 under Pope John XIII until his death in 1963. Pope Paul IV took over and concluded the Council in fall of 1965.


The lack of unanimity is well documented. For example, see F.J. Laishley, “Unfinished Business” in *Modern Catholicism: Vatican II and After*, edited by Adrian Hastings.

Joseph P. Chinnici’s article “Reception of Vatican II in the United States” *Theological Studies* 64.3 (Sept 2003): 461-495 (E34). Expanded Academic ASAP. Thomson Gale. Florida State University, provides an excellent introduction to the contested conciliar meaning of pastoral.

Chinnici, “Reception of Vatican II in the United States,” E9, E3.

I of course, do not want to discount a broad, fuller history of Catholic social teaching and thought in the 20th century. For example, one cannot ignore the role of women religious in education and the civil rights movement of the 1950s.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) was established in 1966 in order for bishops to direct church affairs in the U.S. The United States Catholic Conference was also established the same year as an institutional structure in which bishops collaborated with other Catholics to address issues
pertaining to the church. The two combined in 2001 to create the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

33 These documents of Catholic Social teaching are just two of a vast cannon of papal documents and US Catholic bishops spanning 110-plus years. For an excellent study of the historical development of these changes in “Catholic ethics” see Charles E. Curran, Catholic Social Teaching, 1891-Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP, 2002).

34 The concept of personalism developed as a theology focused on the individual rights and human dignity of a person.


37 O’Brien and Shannon, 287. For the Justice in the World document, see pages. 288-300.

38 There is a dearth of good material and no definitive work on the impacts of Vatican II. I make no claims for simplifying the complex historical processes of Vatican II, but I hope that this project will contribute to the narrative. No documents from the Second Vatican Council explicitly mention homosexuality, but groups like New Ways Ministry interpret the encompassing social teachings of justice and human rights to their work and often bring up the reformist visions of Vatican II for the very cause of their ministry.

39 It wasn’t until the late 1960s and early 1970s that Mattachine and Daughters of Bilitis’s members split over less radical and more radical tactics. Other scholars have challenged the assumption that the Mattachine Society was assimilationist. See Marin Meeker, “Behind the Mask of Respectability: Reconsidering the Mattachine Society and Male Homophile Practice, 1950s and 1960s,” Journal of the History of Sexuality, 10:1 (2001): 78-116.


42 The history of the Council on the Religion and the Homosexual (CRH) deserves its own paper. In 2005 the GLBT Archives will be featuring an exhibit and writings on the CRH. I short, many clergy became acutely aware of the oppression experienced by gay and lesbians when they were harassed by police and arrested when holding joint events.

43 In some ways the story of birth control and the church mirrors the issue of homosexuality a decade latter. Reformist-minded Catholics appealed to experience, recognized the authority of the laity, and felt a disconnect with church officials. See Leslie Woodcock Tentler, Catholics and Contraception (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004). For more on the historical overview of the traditional position, see Thomas Thurston,

Thurston, 13.


July, August, September 1971 issues of Homiletic and Pastoral Review. See Thurston’s take on McNeill on pages 8-12.


McNeill position was clearly stated, “It will become evident quickly to the discerning reader that I am not following the classical “natural law” philosophy. Rather, I consider myself a disciple of the great French Catholic philosopher Maurice Blondel, whose philosophy of action was one of the principal sources Teilhard de Chardin’s thought and played an essential role in the thinking of many of the periti at the Second Vatican Council.” (18).

McNeill, 218.
McNeill, 221.

McNeill, xi.


Roche, 2-4. For instance, by November 1971 Dignity Louisville became the first chapter of Dignity outside of California.

As quoted in McNeill, 8.


Joseph McCaffrey, “Homosexuality in the Seventies” *Catholic World* 212 no. 1275 (June 1971), 121.

Ibid. In the next issue McCaffrey contributed, “Homosexuality, Aquinas, and the Church” *Catholic World* 212 no. 1276 (July 1971): 183-186. He attributes Aquinas as the major influence of contemporary Roman Catholic condemning attitudes towards homosexuality. McCaffrey wants to reopen this discussion within orthodox Catholic thinking and develop new ethics of sex for the church. Interesting to note that one of the published letters to the editor regarding McCaffrey’s article was written by “a non-practicing Catholic and a devout homosexual how hope to become a devout Catholic and non-practicing homosexual.” He blames McCaffrey and his aspirations for the church as too accommodating and sympathetic. MasterCharge Holder, West Coast, “Homosexuality,” *Catholic World* 214 no. 1279 (Oct. 1971): 5-6.

On homosexual action as condemned, “Principles” states: “The objective morality of sexual acts is based upon the teaching of the Church concerning Christian marriage: Genital sexual expression between a man and a woman should take place only in marriage...Sexual acts between members of the same sex are contrary not only to one of the purposes of the sexual faculty, namely, procreation, but also to the other principal purpose, which is to express mutual love between husband and wife. For these reasons homosexual acts are a grave transgression of the goals of human sexuality and of human personality, and are consequently contrary to the will of God.” The document also states, “The subjective morality of homosexual acts must be considered under two aspects, the origin of the tendency, and the manner in which the person controls it.” At the same time the bishops condemn sexual acts, on the pastoral level they advocate compassion (“avoid harshness and permissiveness”), human dignity, and (chaste) friendships “Principles to a Guide Confessors in Questions of Homosexuality” National Conference of

65 Although *Humane Vitae* finalized church teaching on birth control, marriage, and children. The debate had not completely quelled by the early 1970s. In fact, many Catholics were disillusioned with the Vatican’s pronouncement, and further discussions of women’s ordination and married priests only fueled the matter. For an excellent survey of the birth control and the church, see Leslie Woodcoock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception, An American History* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004).


67 Peter Fink “A Pastoral Hypothesis” *Commonweal* 98 no. 5 (6 April 1973): 107.

68 Chinnici, “Reception of Vatican II in the United States.”

69 Gene Burns, *The Frontiers of Catholicism: The Politics of Ideology in a Liberal World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 3. Although Burns complicates the categories of the secular political left and political right as applied to Catholicism, the point, as we shall see, is that many Catholics could not understand why the church did not consider injustice against homosexual persons as damaging as economic injustices in the third world for example. One could extend the concern to a variety of social issues including women and gender.

70 Fink, 111.

71 The John J. McNeill and Charles Chiarelli Gay and Lesbian Liberation Collection; Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, California: Box 2 file folder 41a. The speech was republished in the Oct. 5, 1973 edition of the *National Catholic Reporter*.

72 Baum was convinced that human nature was not simply a given and that the church’s natural law argument was seriously flawed. Gregory Baum, “Catholic Homosexuals,” *Commonweal* 99 no. 19 (15 Feb 1974): 479-482.

73 Dignity position statement as quoted in Baum, 479.

74 Baum, 479.

75 Baum, 482.


77 This is the perspective of Jeannine Gramick and Pat Furey, eds., *The Vatican and Homosexuality* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), xiv.

80. McNeill gave many interviews, including making appearances on the Donohue Show and the Today Show.


83. In the larger religious community, the progressive magazine Christianity and Crisis continued the discussion on homosexuality and the church in its May 30 - June 13, 1977 special issue devoted to the topic. See “Debate on Homosexuality: We Vote for Change,” Christianity and Crisis, 37 (30 May-13 Jun. 1977): 114-144. See chapter 4 for more information on the Committee on the Study of Human Sexuality.

84. See Chapter 1 for more information on the lives of Gramick and Nugent as well as the beginning of New Ways Ministry.

85. The articles are too numerous to list here, but the following is a sample list of anthologies and books:
   - Jeannine Gramick, ed. Homosexuality and the Catholic Church. (Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1983);
   - Robert Nugent, A Challenge to Love (Crossroad Press, 1983);

87. San Francisco Archbishop John Quinn served as President of the NCCB at the time.

88. This is not to imply that councils of bishops were the only ones releasing statements on homosexuality and the church. Additional positive statements from individual bishops, religious orders, and theologians regarding issues of homosexuality and the church can be found in Gramick, Voices of Hope, 12. The same year Gerlad D. Coleman published, Homosexuality – An Appraisal (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1978) in which he favored civil rights, but still deemed homosexuality a moral disorder.

89. McNeill, xii.
Catholic Council for Church and Society was composed of the bishops of the Netherlands. See Gramick, *The Vatican and Homosexuality*, xiv.

The bishops of England and Wales formed the Catholic Social Welfare Commission.

Gramick, *The Vatican and Homosexuality*, xv.


Gramick and Nugent danced around the issue of homosexual expression in the 1970s, never fully endorsing or prohibiting it, but this would not remain the case. By the early 1990s, Gramick and Nugent more openly discussed the “complex reality of human sexuality.” They affirmed that many gays and lesbians would only feel accepted in their Christian community when church authorities recognized “the goodness of committed, faithful homosexual love.” See Gramick, *Voices of Hope*, 66-67.


Archbishop Weakland of Milwaukee was a staunch supporter pastoral sensitivity and civil rights. Another progressive diocese of the era was Trenton, NJ whose bishop appointed Father Vincent Inghilterra as the first diocesan liaison for ministry to sexual minorities. Bishop Walter F. Sullivan of Richmond started a ministry for the gay community as well and collaborated with New Ways on several occasions. Additional individual bishops include John Roache (Minneapolis-St. Paul), Carroll Dozier (Memphis), and John Dearden (Detroit). Gay rights legislation was also strongly opposed, especially in the dioceses of Miami, Wichita, and New York. See Nugent, Gramick, and Oddo, *Homosexual Catholics*, 18.


Hunthausen was an advocate for civil rights and social justice. Church authorities did not look favorably upon his protests against the Vietnam War. In 1983 he spearheaded the Washington State Catholic Conference and their publication *Prejudice against Homosexual and the Ministry of the Church*. The report urged that the church teaching on homosexuality needed rethink, more research, and critical discussion. It challenged the infallibility of teachings and Hunthausen even invited Dignity to hold its national convention in Seattle. As a result of his outspokenness, Vatican officials punished Hunthausen by demoting his authority in the diocese through the appointment of another bishop. See chapter 4 for more information.

For more information on Quinn, see Jeffrey M. Burns, “Beyond the Immigrant Church,” in *US Catholic Historian*, 79-92.


The Conference for Catholic Lesbians held their retreat at center called Kirkridge in Bangor, Pennsylvania and over 100 women participated in Nov. 1982. The event was affirming of Catholic spiritualism and heritage as well as feminism and lesbianism. The First national Symposium on
Homosexuality and the Catholic Church was held Nov. 20-22, 1981. The goal of the symposium was to provide church leaders with “basic and solid information regarding homosexuality from the perspective of sociology, moral, pastoral and feminist theology, religious life and celibacy, as well as form the experience of lesbian and gay persons themselves.” The goal of the organizers was not to present a political agenda, but instead be an educational presentation with a variety of perspectives. See, Gramick, *Homosexuality and the Catholic Church*, 11. Jeannine Gramick, ed. *Homosexuality and the Catholic Church* (Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1983).


103 Burns, 83.


109 Issues of the church’s role in relieving the suffering of the AIDS epidemic is beyond the scope of this paper. Most of the reactions and debates are found in Catholic lay journals. However, see Richard L. Smith, *AIDS, Gays, and the American Catholic Church* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994) for a good overview of the church’s response.


113 This is not to suggest that people are not working on it. Much excitement has been generated by the LGBT Religious Archives launched in 2000, which is managed out of the Chicago Theological Seminary by project coordinator Mark Bowman. The network links historians, writers, archivists, and activists, while also providing support for ongoing projects on LGBT religious history. For instance, Bernie Schlager of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at the Pacific School of Religion is working on a manuscript on Dignity. James Waller, a writer in New York, has been working on a protestant history of gay and lesbian religious movements for over a decade. Theologian Mary Hunt is working on a manuscript about female same-sex love and religion.

CHAPTER ONE


5 The School Sisters of Notre Dame is a religious order founded in Munich, Germany in 1833. They came to the United States in the 1840s and their main focus is education.

6 Gramick attributes her developing feminist consciousness to reading and working closely with members of the National Assembly of Women Religious (NAWR) and the National Coalition of American Nuns (NCAN), from which she “came to understand the extent of the blatant exclusion of women from substantial participation and decision-making at all ecclesiastical levels.” See Jeannine Gramick, “From Good Sisters to Prophetic Women” in Ann Patrick Ware, S.L., ed. Midwives of the Future: American Sisters Tell Their Story (Kansas City, MO: Leaven Press, 1985), 231. Gramick's account of her "stumbling" into the gay liberation movement is interesting because scholarship suggest the civil rights movement, women's movement, and anti-war protests paved the way for gay liberation. Women religious
and some priests were involved in such movements, but Gramick makes no personal connection in her own life.

7 The partnership between Episcopal churches and the GLF began early on in the history of the GLF’s start in New York City. Beginning in 1969, the GLF initially held its Sunday night meetings at Alternate U. and then moved the meetings to the Church of the Holy Apostles, an Episcopal church that would later self-identify as an inclusive parish.

8 Dominic Bash had even explored religious life for a short time.


10 The beginnings of Gramick and Nugent’s exploration into gay ministry are repeated in many different times over the years and become a part of their own identity and historical narrative. It is interesting to note that details of the initial meeting are slightly different depending to whom the history is recounted. For example see, “The Gays and the Church, A priest and a nun tell why they minister to homosexuals,” Ottawa Journal. 2 Feb. 1978, reprinted in Bondings (Fall 1978), 4; Lee Steele, “Compassionate Ministry For Gays Provided by Catholic Nun, Priest,” Toledo Blade. 19 March 1983, reprinted in Bondings (Spring/Summer 1983), 6.

11 Jeannine Gramick, interview with author, March 10, 2006. Note, there were no women, besides Gramick, at the first home mass. The group quickly grew from 10 to 50 people. Mass was just one of the activities the group organized. Gramick marched in the 1971 Pride Parade in New York City with gay Catholics.


15 Ibid.


It is interesting to note that this group circulated an underground Catholic newspaper in Philadelphia. The diocesan paper was called The Catholic Standard and Time, but the underground paper was called The Catholic Substandard and Time. The Catholic Substandard and Time provided a forum for priests to express what was happening in their lives and served as forum for religious reform.


Ibid.

While Nugent was able to continue functioning as a priest low key while on unofficial leave, he was not granted permission by the diocese to officiate his niece’s marriage or a cousin’s funeral. He put in his request to officiate the marriage in writing to the Cardinal John Joseph Krol. Despite his efforts for approval, diocese contacted the church and instructed the parish priest that Nugent in no way could take part in the service. A similar situation occurred with a family funeral. Nugent wanted to concelebrate the mass and stand on the alter with the other priest, but the priest know Nugent had been in trouble with the diocese and forbade him to participate.

Ibid.


The Dignity/Inc. headquarters (later Dignity/USA) moved to Boston in 1973.


The Philadelphia Dignity Chapter claims Gramick as one of the founding mothers because of her organizing efforts and initiation of the first home masses.
Nugent helped secure the location for Dignity/Washington D.C. to eventually meet on the campus of Georgetown University. The location drew massive crowds for over fifteen years. However, the president of Georgetown University, Timothy Healy, forbade the Dignity mass in 1987 after ordered to relay the message by Archbishop Hickey and a 1986 letter by Cardinal Ratzinger to bishops that called for the expulsion of groups like Dignity from diocesan property.

32 DIGNITY/Baltimore Press Release, S1 Box 4: Dignity, Baltimore, MD 1979/1986, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


35 The Society of the Divine Saviour is a religious order of priests and brothers founded in Rome in 1881.


39 Ramon Wagner, SDS to Bob Nugent, 8 June 1976, NWM S3 Box 1: Quixote Center (Oct. 1976) New Ways Workshop, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


41 O’Brien and Shannon, 287. For the Justice in the World document see pages. 288-300. The next year the National Federation of Priests’ Councils met and noted that “the church’s concern for and ministry to the homosexual community is practically invisible and, therefore, nonexistent in the United States.” See John McNeill, The Church and the Homosexual, 8.


45 Gramick, Homosexuality and the Catholic Church, 11.

46 Quixote Center Staff, “More Help from Our Friends,” Bondings (Spring/Summer 1979), 2.
I realize that both “liberal” and “conservative” are loaded terms. However, this is how writers of the time described fragmentation of the Catholic Church and how each side described itself against the other. I choose to use “progressive” and “traditional” which are a bit more nuanced, but not without their own limitations.

I do not want to discount those who left the church because they were frustrated and felt that the reform efforts were not going far enough. However, this project’s focus is on those that remained and attempted reform.

At least this is what Gramick and Nugent profess to be the aim of the intended dialogue. However, opponents supposed Gramick and Nugent’s call for action and reform did not articulate a middle position, but rather a radically progressive ministry.

37 Bondings (Fall 1979), 7. Gramick and Nugent’s religious orders also provided funding for New Ways Ministry.

38 Linell Smith, “Nun, priest offer counseling on issue of homosexuality,” The Evening Sun, Baltimore, MD (31 Oct. 1979) as reprinted in Bondings (Fall 1979), 8


62 Gramick, Homosexuality and the Catholic Church, 15; Lee Steele, Compassionate Ministry For Gays Provided by Catholic Nun, Priest” Toledo Blade. 19 March 1983, reprinted in Bondings (Spring/Summer 1983), 6.

63 Lee Steele, Compassionate Ministry For Gays Provided by Catholic Nun, Priest” Toledo Blade. 19 March 1983, reprinted in Bondings (Spring/Summer 1983), 6.


66 “’Be positive’ –Catholic Congress,” Bondings (Spring/Summer 1980), 7.

67 Linell Smith, “Nun, priest offer counseling on issue of homosexuality,’ The Evening Sun, Baltimore, MD (31 Oct. 1979) as reprinted in Bondings (Fall 1979), 8

68 Ibid.


72 Robert Nugent, Interview with the author, March 9, 2006.


74 NWM gave a workshop to 7th Day Adventists in Tacoma Park, Maryland on April 9, 1980. S3 Box 1 April 1978 Seventh Day Adventist Workshop, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library. S3 Box 1. See the following folders for examples of workshops: Nov. 1979: Toronto NWM workshops; March 1980: Theological College, Washington, DC; April 1980: Marymount College Tarrytown, New York; April 1980: Sisters of St. Joseph, Ohio; April 1980: Oppression and Sexual Stereotyping, Georgetown University; May 1980: St. Pius X Milwaukee; May/June 1980: Mercy Center (Detroit); June 6-9 1980: Women’s Weekend Silver Spring, MD; Oct. 1980: Center for Reflective Action, Sisters of St. Joseph Mont Marie, Holyoke, Mass.; Nov. 1980: Weber Center Retreat, Adrian, Michigan. S3 Box 2, see folders: Holy Name College (DC) and St. Mary’s Seminary (Baltimore) 28 March and April 4, 1981; April 28 1981 Kent State Campus Min., NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.
Gramick and Nugent were adamant about the importance of expressing personal narratives and experiences as expressed by gay and lesbian Catholics, even their own. In interviews and publications, they often recounted how their initial, negative stereotypes of gays and lesbian and their theologies changed when counseling and simply understanding their experiences with the church.

Mary Ann Fleetwood to NWM, Jan. 1977, S3 Box 1: January 1977 Quixote Center Holy Name College, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

This model of reform as first understanding the experiences of gays and lesbians and then changing public opinion with developments in the sciences was not much different than the tactics of early gay rights movements of the early to late 1960s, especially the work of the Council on Religion and the Homosexual beginning in 1964.

Rita Gillmon, “Gays’ Ministry Role is Studied,” The San Diego Union (1 Sept. 1979), as reprinted in Bondings (Fall 1979), 3.

Gramick, Homosexuality and the Catholic Church, 15.


It is interesting to note that Gramick wanted to diversity her subjects for the study and advertised for Hispanic and African-American participants. New Ways attempted to diversify its ministry by learning the needs of and outreach to “Black gay people” and “Hispanic gay Catholics.” See “Visitors and Guests,” Bondings (Spring/Summer, 1981), 5. Gramick also published in sociology and social work journals. For example see, Jeannine Gramick, “Homophobia: A New Challenge,” Social Work: Journal of the National Association of Social Workers, vol. 28 no.2 (March-April, 1983): 137-141.

Of course funding was important as well. Gramick worked on another grant for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Public Health Service to study the relationship between church affiliation and attitudes towards homosexuality. Nugent even contacted sociologist Andrew Greely in fall 1979 to seek professional advice about sampling. The grant was denied by the Life Course Review Committee Child and Family, in a summary review released May 1980 because “reviewers thought that the area was important but the research design.” See S1 Box 7: HEW Study Proposal by Dorothy J. Gramick, 1977, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


99 Again, more women religious then men were willing to publicly and actively engage in Catholic lesbian and gay issues.

100 Pat Gallagher, RSM to Jeannine Gramick and Robert Nugent, 4 Oct. 1976, S3 Box 1: Sept 1976 Holy Name New Ways Workshop, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.
101 Ray Lambert to Jeannine Gramick and Robert Nugent, 29 Sept. 1976, S3 Box 1: Sept 1976 Holy Name New Ways Workshop, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

102 Sr. Fara Impasto to Robert Nugent, n.d. 1979, S3 Box 1: Lesbian Nuns Retreat (May 4-6, 1979) Correspondence and Information 1979, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

103 James Mauslof, OFM to NWM, 16 May 1979, S3 Box 1: Lesbian Nuns Retreat (May 4-6, 1979) Correspondence and Information 1979, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

104 Dignity/Central Pennsylvania outline, S3 Box 1: Oct. 1976 Dignity Central PA, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


107 Note, at the time, Theresa Kane, RSM was the provincial for the Sisters of Mercy of the Union. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, several RSMs involved in political life or state and national agencies would be subject to scrutiny by the Vatican. Kane is famously remembered for public speaking to Pope John Paul II about that lack of support for women religious during a visit to the United States.. For more on Kane, see, Theresa Kane, “Civil Rights in A Church of Compassion,” in Homosexuality and the Catholic Church (Chicago, Ill.: Thomas More Press, 1983): 121-128. Mary Jo Weaver, New Catholic Women: A Contemporary Challenge to Traditional Religious Authority (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1985), 86, 97-98, 100.

108 Charlotte Doclar’s story is told in Nancy Manahan and Rosemary Curb’s Lesbian Nuns, Breaking the Silence edited (Tallahassee, FL: Naiad Press, 1985) as well as "Lesbian Nuns; Charlotte Doclar's story," MS, August 1985, volume 14, pg. 8 (2). The “Oral History Interview: Charlotte Doclar”, interviewed by Arden Eversmeyer, May 20, 2005 can be found at the LGBT Religious Archives Network http://www.lgbtran.org/Exhibits/Doclar/Bio.htm. See the oral history interview transcript for Doclar’s fond memories of the Lesbian Nun’s Retreat, including the retreat attendee’s trip to a Washington, D.C. gay bar, midnight visits to memorials, and their exhilarating sense of recognizing their lesbian identities. She also remembers that attendees suffered much anxiety over whether to remain in or leave religious life. Doclar left religious life shortly after working with NWM in 1981.

109 Ruth Marie May, SSND to Those who received notice and news release from New Ways Ministry, Feb. 1979, S3 Box 1: Lesbian Nuns Retreat (May 4-6, 1979) Clippings and Correspondence, 1979, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

110 Ibid.

111 Jeannine Gramick to Sr. Ruth Marie May, 12 Feb. 1979, S3 Box 1: Lesbian Nuns Retreat (May 4-6, 1979) Clippings and Correspondence, 1979, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

112 Jeannine Gramick, Interview with author, March 10, 2006.

114 *Bondings* (Fall 1979), 7. NWM held several lesbian nun retreats beyond the first one. For example, see S3 Box 2: Lesbian Nun Retreat (May 29-31, 1981) Correspondence, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

115 Ruther Marie May to Brian McNaught, 13 June 1979, S3 Box 1: Lesbian Nuns Retreat (May 4-6, 1979) Correspondence and Information 1979, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

116 This negotiation is explored in detail in chapter 3.

117 Rev. Myron Wagner, SDS to Rev. Father General Gerard Rogowski, SDS, 24 May, 1979, S3 Box 1: Lesbian Nuns Retreat (May 4-6, 1979) Clippings and Correspondence, 1979, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

118 Ruth Marie May to Mr. Ronald Lawrence, 29 May 1979, S3 Box 1: Lesbian Nuns Retreat (May 4-6, 1979) Clippings and Correspondence, 1979, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

119 Sr. M. Agnes to NWM, 12 Feb. 1979, S3 Box 1: Lesbian Nuns Retreat (May 4-6, 1979) Clippings and Correspondence, 1979, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

120 The Rockhaven Center for Holistic Living was purchased in 2003 and renamed the Rockhaven Ecozoic Center. The retreat center is an interfaith center that allows visitors to deepen and renew their own spiritual journey. It fosters an interest in feminine spirituality, mystical traditions, and indigenous traditions.

121 Catholic Laymens League of St. Michael the Archangel and St. Maria Goretti to DIGNITY/St. Louis. n.d. S1 Box 4: Dignity St. Louis, 1978/1981, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

122 Father Walter Dolan, O.F.M to Jeannine Gramick, 5 April 1982, S1 Box 5: General Correspondence, 1977-1988, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

123 Robert Nugent to Fr. Walter Dolan, 13 April, 1982, S1 Box 5: General Correspondence, 1977-1988, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

124 Catholic Council for the Church and Society (The Netherlands), *Homosexual People in Society: A Contribution to the Dialogue within the Faith Community*, trans, Bernard A. Nachbar, (Mt. Ranier MD: New Ways Ministry, 1980), Dutch ed. 1979. This is not to say that there was not a “flurry of protests” over homosexual issues in the Dutch church. Nugent reported that of the 7 Dutch bishops, 2 were appointed by Paul VI and usually disagreed with the other 5. He suggested that the 2 dissenting bishops thought that the 5 acting in a collegial fashion and pastoral direction should be curtailed. See Bob Nugent, “England and Holland,” *Bondings* (Spring/Summer 1979), 2.


127 Quest was the gay Catholic group in England while the Gay Christian Movement was predominately a Protestant organization.
See Chapter 4. Reorientation and attempting to “convert those who consent to their sin” was not just the opinion of conservative bishops, but also the subject of many letters to the editor in Catholic press by clergy and lay people. See Tanya Erzen, *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) for an insightful look into the world ex-gay therapy and how queer lives are constructed.


CHAPTER TWO

1 Robert Nugent, Interview with the Author, March 9, 2006.


3 While the postconciliar interpretations of justice are most important in this case, the Catholic Church in America has an extended history of working for social reform. This is particularly traced back to Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and labor issues. See. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, pp. 321-446.


8 There are numerous groups in organized religion, and many do not official relationship to the church, but some do. Some examples from the late 1960s and 1970s include: Dignity (Roman Catholic), 1969; American Baptists Concerned, 1972; Lutheran Concerned (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America), 1974; More Light Presbyterians (Presbyterian Church, USA), 1974; Integrity (Episcopal Church), 1974; Evangelicals Concerned, 1975; Affirmation (United Methodists), 1976; Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, 1976; Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian and Gay Concerns, 1976; Affirmation

9 See Peter N. Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1982) and David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994) for analyses of the 1970s as a time of de-radicalization. See Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006) for a review of the contrasting histories of the 1970s. Berkowitz argues that the 1970s was a decade that could stand alone, especially in terms of rights. It was not a reaction to the 1960s or a forbearer to the conservative 1980s. Peter Sweasey in *From Queer to Eternity* makes a similar point about religious institutions seemingly assimilationist agendas, but often radical, liberationist messages (p. 227). It is true that many queer and feminist theorists do consider protest within institutions culturally conservative.


16 S3 Box 1: Sept. 1977 Dignity Convention, Chicago, Nugent Lecture “Dignity and the Institutional Church,” NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Of course, the goals of GLBT religious groups have changed over the last three decades, but this remains an important question in Catholic circles.

Katzenstein, 107.

NWM combined both interest group and discursive politics. See Katzenstein, pages 19 and 120, for her discussion on how discursive politics is different than influence-seeking politics.

S3 Box 1: Sept. 1977 Dignity Convention, Chicago, Nugent Lecture “Dignity and the Institutional Church,” NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

For example, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was too radical for some activists. The National Gay Task Force (later National Gay and Lesbian Task Force or NGLTF) was established in 1973 with the mission to make gay identities more mainstream and demonstrate that gays and lesbians were no different from heterosexuals. In short, the NGLTF launched a public relations campaign that dealt with issues of coming out, civil rights, litigation for privacy rights, and changing the “disordered” connotations with homosexuality. New Ways Ministry shared many of the same goals and objectives with the NGLTF as well as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). Of course, NWM, the NGLTF, and the HRC has not been without critics and adversaries over the years for bending to mainstream or conservative ideologies and tactics.

Andrew Greely recently argued in The Catholic Revolution: New Wine, Old Wineskins, and the Second Vatican Council (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) that sex became the central focus of the postconciliar church. One could argue that debates about sexual ethics and liturgical reform have only intensified over the last three decades.

Robinson, 7.

Conservative gay writer Bruce Bawer makes the argument that homosexuality has no implications for politics or religion in A Place at the Table (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993). See Robinson, pp. 16–42 for his analysis of Bawer’s work.
“Catholic Coalition for Gay Civil Rights,” *Bondings* (Fall 1978), 2. The CCGCR statement is too long to reprint within the text, but a summary statement of social justice, myths, and actions is given. A list of new individuals and groups that backed the Coalition Statement were published in almost every *Bondings* issue along with those that made financial contributions to New Ways Ministry.


Robinson makes a similar point in relation to anti discrimination legislations, or as applied to this Catholic scenario of collective statements, are meant to “make its victims feel included while its authors are shamed.” (Robins on, *Queer Wars*, 55).


The CCGCR ad and the increasing list of supporters ran in several publications for almost a decade. However, the CCGCR ad did receive its fair share of rejections from Catholic publications because it was not officially endorsed by some archdioceses. See S5 Box 1: Advertisements various newspapers correspondence and information, 1979-1986, n.d., NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


S5 Box 1: Advertisements various newspapers correspondence and information, 1979-1986, n.d. NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


Sister Elizabeth Meluch, OCT to Robert Nugent, 26 Dec. 1978, S5 Box 2: General Correspondence 1978-1989, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Rev. James Ratigan of Priests/USA to NWM, 23 June 1978, S1 Box 6: National Federation of Priests Council (NFPC) Correspondence 1977-1987, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library. While the NFPC was considered a progressive, independent association for priest concerns, it was not willing to touch sexuality issues at the time.

Fr. L. Hemp to Robert Nugent, 14 Feb. 1983, S5 Box 1: Endorsements Groups and Individuals Correspondence 1978-1988, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Anonymous, n.d., S1 Box 4: “Disturbed” Correspondence, 1976-1983, n.d. NWM Collection, Marquette University Library. Please note, the sister’s name is illegible.
46 Some people just objected to the length, editing and wording of the statement, such as N. Robert Quirin, the Director of Priestly Life and Formation of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond who supported the CCGCR statement but had some hesitations because he felt the statement was too long. He assumed it would much more effective it was short and to the point. See N. Robert Quirin to NWM, 24, April 1978, S5 Box 1: Endorsements Groups and Individuals Correspondence 1978-1988, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

47 S5 Box 2: General Correspondence 1978-1989, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

48 John A. Kiley to NWM, 2 Nov. 1979, S5 Box 2: General Correspondence 1978-1989, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

50 Dignity handled discussions about sexual activity more openly.

52 Protest acts included lettering cars in parish parking lots, picketing bishops who opposed anti-discrimination bills and writing letters to political leaders. The CCGCR initiative lasted for over 10 years while break off groups, such as the Chicago based Catholic Advocates for Gay and Lesbian Rights, formed and continued working specifically on gay rights bills, lobbying, activism and grassroots organizing. See S1 Box 2: Catholic Advocates for Lesbian and Gay Rights 1987-1993. Also see S5: Catholic Coalition, media coverage, fall 1984/spring 1989, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


54 Jeannine Gramick to Sr. Andrea Lee, 3 May 1978, S2 Box 6: Gay/Lesbian Rights 1978-1998, national Coalition of American Nuns Records, Marquette University Library. The ordinance was defeated on May 9, 1978. Dignity volunteers as well as Catholic Worker volunteers also joined in the leaflet campaign.


59 The American Friends Service Committee Inc. (middle Atlantic regional office) testified as well.
S1 Box 2: Baltimore City Council Bill on Discrimination Correspondence and Information 1980, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Robert Nugent, Testimony, S1 Box1: Baltimore City Council Bill on Discrimination Correspondence and Info, 1980, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Rev. Paul Thomas, Testimony, S1 Box1: Baltimore City Council Bill on Discrimination Correspondence and Info, 1980, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Jeannine Gramick, Testimony, S1 Box1: Baltimore City Council Bill on Discrimination Correspondence and Info, 1980, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

“Priests Back Gay Rights,” National Catholic Register (14 Dec. 1980) as reprinted in Bondings (Winter 1980-1981), 3. See Nugent, Gramick, and Oddo, Homosexual Catholics, 18. Archbishop Weakland of Milwaukee was a staunch supporter pastoral sensitivity and civil rights. Another progressive diocese of the era was Trenton, NJ whose bishop appointed Father Vincent Inghilterra as the first diocesan liaison for ministry to sexual minorities. Bishop Walter F. Sullivan of Richmond started a ministry for the gay community as well and collaborated with New Ways on several occasions. Additional individual bishops include John Roache (Minneapolis-St. Paul), Carroll Dozier (Memphis), and John Dearden (Detroit). But gay rights legislation was also strongly opposed, especially in the dioceses of Miami, Wichita, and New York. The Providence, RI city council almost included a sexual ordination clause in its civil rights bill, but it changed after Bishop Louis E. Gelineau objected.


Sr. Mary Bernard to Jeannine Gramick, 9 May 1979, S3 Box 1: Lesbian Nuns Retreat (May 4-6) Correspondence and Information 1979, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Jeannine Gramick to Archbishop William Boarders, 26 July 1980, S1 Box1: Baltimore City Council Bill on Discrimination Correspondence and Info, 1980, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Overall, Archbishop Boarders considered himself an implementer of Vatican II directives and worked to make the Baltimore diocese more collegial and progressive.


75 O’Connor’s long standing tension with the New York gay community is infamous. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the more radical LGBT activist organization ACT-UP staged several demonstrations at St. Patrick’s Cathedral while ACT-UP and several gay rights groups battled O’Connor and the archdiocese in years of litigation.

76 S1 Box 2: The Consultation on Homosexuality, Social Justice, RC Theology, 1982-1995, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


79 In 1988 Chicago passed the Human Rights Ordinance in part by the efforts and lobbying of Rick Garcia, a Catholic and former staff member at New Ways Ministry.


81 Gramick and Nugent also solicited a letter of recommendation from Bernardin when they were under investigation in the 1990s. According to Nugent, Bernardin declined because he did not know enough about Gramick and Nugent to write a personal letter, but assured them that his decline was not implying negativity about their work.


84 S5 Box 1: Advertisements *Chicago Catholic Refusal to Print Ad Complaint with Catholic Press Association 1986*, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

85 At the time, Minnesota did not have an anti-discrimination law based on sexual orientation.

86 Jeannine Gramick to Rita Halbur, fall 1981, S1 Box 7: Halbur, Rita vs. School Sisters of Notre Dame of Mankato Clippings and Correspondence. NWM Collection, Marquette University Library. The Catholic Pastoral Committee on Sexual Minorities chaired by Cindy Scott and Bill Kummer supported Halbur, but their function to promote justice, understanding, and pastoral ministry was much like NWM, not the much-needed legal support.
Feminism and gender debates were common place within Dignity chapters. Should gender inclusive language be sued in the liturgies? Could women participate in the service? What were women’s roles in Dignity? Could women deliver a homily, etc.? Dignity Philadelphia was particularly conflicted over such issues. See Michelle Dillon, *Catholic Identity: Balancing Reason, Faith, and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).


Jordan, “The Pope Converts,” 266. Jordan calls for scholars to think about gay Catholic and lesbian Catholic issues differently. While in fact, groups like the Lesbian Nuns Retreat, the Conference of Catholic Lesbians, and Women-Church were inherently doing this anyway.


“The event was similar to Women-Church activities that addressed political and spiritual needs of Roman Catholic women. It is interesting to note that Gramick recalled a serendipitous occasion when a friend from grade school attended the conference for lesbian Catholics after the two had not corresponded since high school. In her interview with the author on March 10, 2006, Gramick recalled how the two young girls would go to dances, and Gramick noticed that her friend never went out with any boys. The friend explained her aversion to dating by liking potential dates to how she thought of them as her brother. It was not until medical school that her friend came to terms with her lesbian identity and it was not until Gramick met Dominic Bash that she began exploring gay and lesbian issues. The two reunited at the retreat.


Women Church is now a coalition of mostly Catholic groups and organizations dedicated to feminist principles and eradicating patriarchy, sexism, and racism.

Mary Mendola, “Catholic lesbians visible, vocal,” *National Catholic Reporter* (13 May 1983) as reprinted in *Bondings* (Spring/Summer 1983), 11. Mendola later no longer considered herself as a member of the Roman Catholic Church, and many of her later writings tell of the pain experienced when feeling like she was loosing her Catholic heritage and a part of herself.

Additional examples include moral theologian Charles Curran suing Catholic University in 1988. But as Katzenstein points out, such suits often resulted in a loss (Katzenstein, 146).
100 Gramick, *Homosexuality and the Catholic Church*, 14.

101 The NWM Collection at Marquette University Library has several folders of legal documents, depositions, and briefs detailing this case.


E. Mann, Letter to Editor, *Our Sunday Visitor*, 17 Jan. 1982, S1 Box 8: Our Sunday Visitor Correspondence 1981-1982, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Mr. and Mrs. C.N. Santos, Letter to Editor, *Our Sunday Visitor*, 17 Jan. 1982, S1 Box 8: Our Sunday Visitor Correspondence 1981-1982, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


Father Vincent J. Giese to Robert Nugent, 22 April 1982, S1 Box 8: Our Sunday Visitor Correspondence 1981-1982, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Robert Nugent to Vincent J. Giese, 25 April 1982, S1 Box 8: Our Sunday Visitor Correspondence 1981-1982, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library. *OSV* could be considered a conservative publication. Nugent filed a complaint with the Catholic Press Association regarding the OSV and also won.


Rick Garcia to Mr. Doyle, 10 Sept. 1986, S5 Box 1: Advertisements *Chicago Catholic* Refusal to Print Ad Complaint with Catholic Press Association 1986.

CHAPTER 3


4 Rev. David Hare, S.J. to NWM, April 1978, S5 Box 2: General Correspondence 1978-1989, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

5 Robert Nugent, Interview with author, March 9, 2006.

6 Blythe A Batton to Sr. Marquerite Kropinak, CSJ, 12 October 1984, S5 Box 1: Bevilacqua, Bp. Anthony J. (Bishop of Pittsburgh) Correspondence 1984, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

7 Rev. Stephen C. von Fauer to NWM, 17 February 1983, S1 Box 5: General Correspondence, 1977-1988, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

8 Abbot Edward McCorkell, O.C.S.C to Robert Nugent on 9 October 1979, S3 Box 1: Feb. 1979 Trappist Community Berryville VA Formation Workshop. NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

9 “D.C. Chancery’s Statement of Fact.” *Bondings* (Spring/Summer, 1979), 1. See Robert Nugent and Jeannine Gramick, *Building Bridges: Gay and Lesbian Reality in the Catholic Church* (Mystic, Conn.” Twenty-third Publications, 1995), 199. The social justice organizations the Quixote Center, Center of Concern as well as Catholics for a Free Choice are located in Washington, D.C. The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER), and New Ways Ministry has offices near Mt. Rainier, Maryland.


See Collins, *The Modern Inquisition*, page 129 for an entertaining instance of Gramick standing up to the Archbishop when they finally did have an audience with him. When Gramick and Nugent met with Archbishop Hickey before the Second National Symposium (he was reluctant to do so), she had the audacity to begin a prayer in front of Archbishop Hickey with, “God, or Mother and Father…”


Ann Therese Syron to NWM, 25 January 1985, S1 Box 5: General Correspondence, 1977-1988, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


The NWM workshop in the Houma-Thibodaux Area was one of many in the south November and December 1983. NWM also held workshops at the Incarnate Word Motherhouse in San Antonio, TX; St. Edward’s University; Texas Southern University, and with the Sisters of the Most Holy Sacrament in Lafayette, LA.


John Farnell to Gerald Coleman, S.S. 13 November 1983, S1 Box 2: Coleman, Gerald D. SS. Correspondence, 1979, 1983, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.
26 Gerald D. Coleman, S.S. to John R. Farnell, 17 November 1983, S1 Box 2: Coleman, Gerald D. SS. Correspondence, 1979, 1983, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


34 New Ways incorporated independently of the archdiocese and technically did not fall within its jurisdiction. NWM was incorporated in Maryland and its board was predominately laypersons. See Guilfoy, Bondings (Winter 1983-1984), 1. Technically Nugent was not silenced or even prevented from continuing gay ministry, but he was removed from the Washington area. See Robert Nugent, “Gay Ministry,” Baltimore Sun (25 Nov. 1983) as reprinted in Bondings (Winter 1983-1984), 2.

35 Gramick was on sabbatical at Harvard Divinity School from fall semester 1983 to the end of summer of 1984.


40 “NWM Board of Trustees Statement” as reprinted in Bondings (Winter 1983-1984), 3. The board announced that it received a grant to study members of religious communities and sexual orientation in addition to NWM regular work. Supporters of New Ways assume they are conscience agents that will collectively resist the system, but I do not want to discount the individual meaning-making that could occur for the gay or lesbian Catholic when they attend a Dignity mass that focuses on rituals of inclusiveness and healing. Jean Comaroff, The Body of Power and Spirit of Resistance (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 119, 198.

42 Robert Nugent, Interview with Author, March 9, 2005. Nugent’s reflections on the times when he, Gramick, and NWM were not welcomed in some dioceses or faced scrutiny by bishops, are told with a sense of humor. The pair had the ability to laugh during stressful times and at what seemed like irrational reactions to their work. Nugent recounted a time when he applied to work in the Los Angeles diocese at the time the traditional, hard lined Archbishop Roger Mahoney (now cardinal) was in power. It was rumored Mahoney rejected having Nugent anywhere near his diocese as he commented to his staff that he had already experienced one heart attack and wanted to avoid another.

43 Jeannine Gramick, Interview with author, March 10, 2006.


47 Jeannine Gramick to Friends, March 1984, S2 Box 6: Gramick, Jeannine 1984-2000, National Coalition of American Nuns Records, Marquette University Library. Friends and supporters of NWM wrote to Patricia Flynn, SSND (Gramick’s provincial) and Mary Margaret Johanning, SSND (Gramick’s superior general) from January 1984 through March 1984 expressing the importance and necessity of NWM.


50 Nugent also took a sabbatical from 1982-1983 for continued education at Yale Divinity School and studied with ethicist Margaret Farley.


53 Robert Nugent to Bp. Anthony Bevilacqua, 21 October 1984 and Jeannine Gramick to Bp. Anthony Bevilacqua, 24 October 1984, S5 Box 1: Bevilacqua, Bp. Anthony J. (Bishop of Pittsburgh) Correspondence 1984, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library. By this time women religious are highly aware of that “disciplinary measures” happen without due process. The two most famous examples
include debates over abortion and renewal in religious life. Twenty-four sisters (including Jeannine Gramick), two priests, and two brothers signed an October 4, 1984 ad in the New York Times sponsored by the group Catholics for a Free Choice that called for wider dialogue among Catholics on abortion. The male clerics signed retraction statements, but the various sisters would not and faced disciplinary action by the Vatican. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Catholics and Abortion: Authority vs. Dissent,” in Christian Century. 3 October 1985: 859-582. The Immaculate Heart Community’s turbulent relationship with Cardinal McIntyre throughout the 1960s is detailed in Anita M. Caspary, IHM, Witness to Integrity: The Crisis of the Immaculate Heart Community of California (Collegeville, Minn: The Liturgical Press, 2003).


59 See also Chapter 2 for a brief introduction to the Oct. 4, 1984, Catholics for Free Choice ad.

60 See Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Catholics and Abortion: Authority vs. Dissent,” in Christian Century. 3 October 1985: 859-582. Cases of powerful bishops and the CRSI intervening or rejecting religious community renewal are similar. One of the most famous cases involved The Immaculate Heart Community’s turbulent relationship with Cardinal McIntyre throughout the 1960s is detailed in Anita M. Caspary, IHM, Witness to Integrity: The Crisis of the Immaculate Heart Community of California (Collegeville, Minn: The Liturgical Press, 2003).

61 Mary Jo Weaver, New Catholic Women, 97-99.


Interestingly, in 1983, the Washington State Catholic Conference published *Prejudice Against Homosexuals and the Ministry of the Church* that recommended the Church reevaluate its teachings (all of which are infallible anyway) on homosexuality.


The statement ran in the January 1980 edition of the *National Catholic Reporter*. Interestingly, William Callahan, SJ, director of the Quixote Center and founder of Priests for Equality, was forbidden to preach in the D.C. area and dismissed from the New England Jesuit Providence in 1980. See Katzenstein, 137-141 for more examples. See Weaver, *New Catholic Women* for more on strategies of authoritarian control and effects on specific women religious.

S1 Box 2: Catholic Advocates for Equality Clippings and Correspondence, 1980. See also “Why Quixote?” in *Musings from Rocinante: Quixote Center Newsletter* (November 2000), 3.

Leonard A. Voegtle, FMS to Robert Nugent, 17 December 1984, S1 Box 5: General Correspondence, 1977-1988, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Jim Green to Fr. Barry Griffin, SDS, 28 January 1984, S1 Box 6: Griffin, Rev. Barry SDS and Rev. Girard Rogowski, SDS Correspondence to Supporting New Ways Ministry, 1983-1984, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Jim Green to Fr. Barry Griffin, SDS, 28 January 1984, S1 Box 6: Griffin, Rev. Barry SDS and Rev. Girard Rogowski, SDS Correspondence to Supporting New Ways Ministry, 1983-1984, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library. Note, this file contains dozens of letters of support from priests.

Barbara Freemyer, RSM to Jeannine Gramick, 20 September 1983, S1 Box 5: General Correspondence, 1977-1988, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Paul Morrissyey, OSA to Dignity Officers and Chaplains, 6 March 1977, S1 Box 4: Dignity Philadelphia, 1974-1984, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Paul Morrissyey, OSA to Dignity Officers and Chaplains, 6 March 1977, S1 Box 4: Dignity Philadelphia, 1974-1984, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library. Morrissyey did not leave the priesthood or the Augustinians, but founded the Austin Center for Counseling in New Rochelle, New York in 1992, which provides psychotherapy services that integrate spirituality and psychology.

Fr. Paul Kabat, OMI to New Ways Ministry, March 1984, S1 Box 5: General Correspondence, 1977-1988, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Jeannine Gramick, Interview with Author, March 10, 2006.

Gramick and Nugent, *Voices of Hope*. 

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Note, name not given to protect identity.

Jeannine Gramick, Interview with Author, March 10, 2006.


*The Michigan Catholic* dismissed McNaught and canceled his column.


Paul Perl, Mary Charlotte Chandler; Jonathan L. Wiggins, *In search of best practices in ministry with Gay and Lesbian Catholics: Parishes and Archdioceses* (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries, 2004). Gramick, Interview with author, March 10, 2006. The National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries began in the summer of 1994 as a coalition of 13 dioceses. Dioceses such as Richmond, Baltimore, Seattle, and several others created their own ministries in the 1970s, but it was not until the 1990s that a coalition was formed. For more information, visit [http://www.nacdlgm.org](http://www.nacdlgm.org).


**CHAPTER 4**


2 Note that there are exceptions. For example, this might not be the case in a welcoming and affirming diocese like Syracuse, but generally, at least in published writings, there is an expressed love for Catholic culture and the sacraments but a hate for some institutional church policies.


4 Chris Glaser, *Coming Out as a Sacrament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). Also, Arlene Stein points out in *Strangers Next Door*, that evangelical Christian conversion narratives with themes of transformation, rebirth, and shedding of the old self are similar to themes in coming out narratives (216).

5 Fox, *Sexuality and Catholicism*, 131.


*Bondings* (Fall 1978), 4.


Dignity would be an exception.


McNeill’s papers are located at the Graduate Theological Union Library in Berkeley and several folders are dedicated to *The Church and the Homosexual*. See Box 1 File 39: The Church and the Homosexual Correspondence; Box 1 File 41: Criticism the Church and Homosexual; and Box 1 File 42: Interviews with McNeill about Book. McNeill also recounts his long process and difficulties obtaining the *imprimi protest* and subsequent silencing in more recent editions of *The Church and the Homosexual*.


Brian McNaught, “Born again bigots have their Gay counterparts” *The Washington Blade* (12 Nov. 1982) as reprinted in *Bondings* (Summer/Fall 1982), 2. McNaught published *A Disturbed Peace* in 1981 as a series of essays (1975-1981) on being gay and Catholic. As writer and a journalist, McNaught caught the attention of the press when he was fired from a Catholic newspaper in Detroit when they discovered he was gay. In protest, McNaught published even more articles on being gay and Catholic and participated in a hunger strike against this injustice that gained national attention.

Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons” (1986), section 3. The letter was released on 31 October 1986, but
it was dated 1 October 1986. Bovone served as secretary for the CDF. He was elevated to cardinal in 1998 but died two months later.

19 Of course, I am not the first one to point this out. It seems that most observers, except the Vatican, recognize the tension. The difference is that the Vatican stresses the moral teaching over the pastoral teaching, and the natural law tradition over a justice tradition, especially in regards to sexual issues.

20 For more on the American Catholic Church and AIDS, see Richard L. Smith, AIDS, Gays, and the American Catholic Church (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1994). AIDS activists and ACT UP protested Ratzinger’s visit to New York City in the 1980s.


25 Typically in the affirming scenario, counselors encouraged the primacy of individual conscience.

26 This is an intellectual and activist continuation of social gospel traditions, justice traditions in Roman Catholicism, and liberation theology.


29 Contemporary conservative Christians (both Catholic and Protestant) find evidence and justification that homosexuality is a sin using a literal interpretation of scripture based on the following key passages: Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:24-47, and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Some Christians use 2nd Chronicles 7:14 in justifying and blaming sinners for evil in the world.

31 “M” to Robert Nugent, (no day or month given) 1981, S1 Box 4: “Disturbed” Correspondence, 1976-1983, n.d. NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


36 Dugan McGinley, _Acts of Faith Acts of Love_ (Continuum, 2004), 25. The writings of gay and lesbian Christians who remain practicing their faith or who have left it often speak of this internalization of self-hatred manifesting in their attempts to reconcile a religious and sexual identity. Also see Eugene Kennedy, _The Unhealed Wound: The Church and Human Sexuality_ (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2001).


39 Lust was a more problematic expression of sexuality as well as expressions that were not heteronormative (multiple partners, etc.) Celibacy also complicated what it meant to be a sexual human.


41 Ibid.

42 Ratzinger did qualify permissible violence against gay persons when in the “Letter to the Bishops” he wrote “violent malice in speech or action” was deplorable, but a few sentences later wrote, “…when civil legislation is introduced to protect behavior to which no one has any conceivable right, neither the Church nor society at large should be surprised when other distorted notions and practices gain ground, and irrational and violent reactions increase” (paragraph 10).


44 For more information on the hiddenness of violence, see Rene Girard, _Violence and the Sacred_ (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1972).

46 Mr. James Doherty to Jeannine Gramick, 26 May 1982, S1 Box 4: “Disturbed” Correspondence, 1976-1983, n.d. NWM Collection, Marquette University Library. Mr. Doherty also accused Gramick’s “feminist intellectual friends” as being “anti-Christian” and “anti-God.”


48 Stein, 217.


53 Harvey’s program for chastity is endorsed by the church. However, revisionists and many mediators reject the essential distinction of sexual orientation from behavior. See John Harvey, The Homosexual Person: New Thinking in Pastoral Care (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 18 and The Truth About Homosexuality, The Cry of the Faithful (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996).

54 Harvey, The Homosexual Person, 122.

55 C. Brown to Catholic Coalition for Gay Civil Rights, n.d., S5 Box 2: General Correspondence 1978-1989, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

56 For instance, George Heinemann of Showmakers, Inc. (New York) produced a program on homosexuality and Catholic gay ministry and tapped some of the project at St. Malachy’s Cathedral. Nugent appreciated the program because he found it balanced. But John Harvey did not agree,
complaining that too much time was spent on Dignity and the film presented an imbalanced view of homosexuality. See Robert Nugent to George Heinemann, 16 February 1984 and John Harvey to Rev. Leo J. Gorman, 19 January 1984, S1 Box 8: “That’s the Spirit” Tapper Productions Correspondence 1984, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


58 Contemporary reparative therapists conceive the origins of homosexuality along outdated psychoanalytical models blaming homosexual orientation on a developmental disorder. However, they have also modified their rhetorical strategies to better fit with contemporary mental health jargon, although there is little discourse between supporters of reparative therapy and endorsed mental health organizations. Joseph Nicolosi, founder of National Association for the Research and Treatment of Homosexuality (NARTH) is one of the leading reparative therapists that markets his therapy as a secular, science based therapy. Nicolosi is catholic and friends with John Harvey. For Nicolosi, the essential principle of reparative therapy is for the therapist to “balance active challenge with warm encouragement to follow the father-son, mentor-pupil model. This is an essential principle of reparative therapy,” Joseph Nicolosi. Healing Homosexuality: Case Stories of Reparative Therapy (Northville, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1993), viii. Also see, Tanya Erzen, Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversion in the Ex-Gay Movement (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006)

In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association (APA) voted to remove homosexuality from its official list of mental disorders. The American Medical Association and the American Bar Association agreed to deplore all public and private discrimination against homosexuals in 1974, and the next year the American Psychological Association also “urged all mental health professions to take the lead in removing the stigma of mental illness that has long been associated with homosexual orientations.”

59 Orsi, Between Heaven and Earth, 24.

60 Courage’s philosophy for “healing” focused on individual, sexual sin and was the exact opposite of Gramick and Nugent’s emphasis on healing social sin.


64 Ibid.

65 Maruice Shinnick, This Remarkable Gift: Being Gay and Catholic (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1997), 131.


Jeannine Gramick, "Rome Speaks, the Church Responds" in Gramick and Furey, 97.

Jeannine Gramick, "Rome Speaks, the Church Responds" in Gramick and Furey, 98.

Jeannine Gramick, Interview with Author, 10 March 2006.

Hinze, 248.

This is the tension that Michelle Dillon investigates in her study of Dignity. See Michelle Dillon, *Catholic Identity: Balancing Reason, Faith, and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 19, 22. The Catholic Church was an object of scorn form most in the gay and lesbian community as the prima facie example of intolerance, ignorance, and abuse of power. However, parody can be a useful expression of agency and resistance. The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence would serve as interesting case study in performativity using theorist Judith Butler’s ideas that parody is a political act. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). For more on Butler’s ideas of drag performance as subversive acts, see, Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matte: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

Sister Mary Ann Hilgeman to NWM, 20 February 1985, S1 Box 5: General Correspondence, 1977-1988, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

For more on Fertig (Sister Boom Boom), and her work for AIDS related philanthropy, see Oral History Number 98-019, interviewed by Roland Schembari in 1998, at the GLBT Historical Society.

Rick Garcia to Sister Mary Ann Hilgeman to NWM, 25 April 1985, S1 Box 5: General Correspondence, 1977-1988, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

Of course later gender and queer theorists influenced by Judith Butler and Foucaultian ideas on discourse would disagree.
81 Brian McNaught to Robert Nugent, 19 July 1979, S3 Box 1: May 1976 Dignity East Coast, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


83 Mari Castellanos to NWM, 29 October 1987, S1 Box 1: Anniversary Celebration Correspondence 1987, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

84 Mari Castellanos to NWM, 29 October 1987, S1 Box 1: Anniversary Celebration Correspondence 1987, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


86 Gramick, *Homosexuality and the Catholic Church*, 11.

87 Conservative writers would make similar claims desexualizing gay and lesbian identities in the early 1990s. See Bruce Bawer’s *A Place at the Table* and analysis of his argument by Paul Robinson in *Queer Wars*, 21.

88 Mary Ann Fleetwood to Robert Nugent, January 1977, S3 Box 1: January 1977 Quixote Center Holy Name College, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

89 Mary Crane to NWM, 28 June 1985, S1 Box 5: General Correspondence, 1977-1988, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

90 Robert Nugent to Mary Crane, 17 July 1985, S1 Box 5: General Correspondence, 1977-1988, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

91 Robert Nugent to Mary Crane, 17 July 1985, S1 Box 5: General Correspondence, 1977-1988, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.

92 Mary Crane to Robert Nugent, 8 October 1984, S1 Box 5: General Correspondence, 1977-1988, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


96 Father Paul Kabat to NWM. (no month or day given) 1984, S1 Box 5: General Correspondence, 1977-1988. NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


101 Not all groups were immediately removed from Catholic premises, as the reaction time largely depended on the sympathies of the bishop. It was not long, however, before all Dignity chapters were informed that no longer use church property.

102 Jeannine Gramick and Pat Furey, eds. The Vatican and Homosexuality, xviii-xix.

103 It was not just Gramick and Nugent who tried to find positive glimpses of worth in the much maligned “Halloween Letter,” but also bishops like San Francisco’s John Quinn who desperately mined the document for hope. See articles in Jeannine Gramick and Pat Furey, eds. The Vatican and Homosexuality: Reactions to the “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons (New York: Crossroad, 1988).

104 Charles Curran, “Foreword,” in Building Bridges, Gay and Lesbian Reality and the Catholic Church by Robert Nugent and Jeannine Gramick (Mystic, CT: Twenty-third Publications, 1992), v. Nugent remembers Curran wondering how Gramick and Nugent survived magisterial pressure. Nugent and Gramick went to Curran for advice over the years, but Curran once commented to them, that he should visit Gramick and Nugent for advice as they lasted so long under immense scrutiny and stress. Robert Nugent, Interview with Author (9 March 2006).

105 Nugent and Gramick, Building Bridges, 207.

106 Nugent and Gramick, Building Bridges, 207. Anthropologist Jean Comaroff’s study of resistance in Apartheid South Africa is instructional here. Subversive activities within institutions “always perpetuate as they change” as they draw on cultural reproductions and transformations. The question remains, how

107 Comstock, 25.

108 Edward Freeman to the Very Rev. Myron Wagner, SDS, 29 January 1979, S1 Box 3: Communities-Gay Religion Correspondence and Info, 1978-1979. NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


110 Christina Love to NWM, 8 January 1988, S1 Box 5: General Correspondence, 1988-1993, NWM Collection, Marquette University Archives.

111 See the introduction to Armour and St. Ville, eds., *Bodily Citations*.


115 Butler, 25.

CHAPTER 5

1 Nugent and Gramick, *Building Bridges*, 206. It was not only Gramick and Nugent who tried to find some positive remnants in the “Ratzinger Letter,” but also bishops like San Francisco’s John Quinn who desperately mined the document for hope. See articles in Jeannine Gramick and Pat Furey, eds. *The Vatican and Homosexuality: Reactions to the “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (New York: Crossroad, 1988).


3 The name would later be changed to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) in 1988.

4 Provincial Director, Justin a Pierce, SDS makes this point in a letter to Robert Nugent, 3 May 1982. “SDS/Provincial and Gay Ministry” (Unprocessed Files), Robert Nugent Papers, Marquette University Library.

5 See Chapter 1 for more information on the Lesbian Nuns Retreat.


8 Sister Sr. Ruth Marie May to Sr. Jeannine Gramick, 12 April 1982. Personal Papers of Jeannine Gramick. Fr. McCormick’s willingness to state his position on the morality of sexual behavior to the CRSI was rather bold given the increasing number of censured theologians under Pope John Paul II.


10 Sr. Patricia Flynn to Sister Mary Margaret Johanning and General Councilors, 10 March 1986. Personal Papers of Jeannine Gramick.


13 Jeannine Gramick, Interview with Author, March 10, 2006.


18 For example, NCAN and NARW released March 1984 press releases denouncing Hickey’s pressure on NWM. Headlines popped up in the Catholic and gay press from these releases. For example, a April 4, 1984 *Update* headline (a Southern California gay publication) read “Nuns Trash Bishop on Gays” or a March 22, 1984 headline in *The Catholic Messenger* of Davenport, Iowa read, “Hickey Pressure on Group for Homosexuals.” See S2 Box 6: Gramick, Jeannine 1984-2000, National Coalition of American Nuns Records, Marquette University Library.
Salvatorians were largely supported and encouraged by Milwaukee’s Archbishop Robert Weakland who also faced scrutiny from traditionalist leadership for his progressive views.


34 Robert Nugent, S.D.S., “Homosexuality and the Vatican,” Christian Century. 101 (9 May 1984), 487. In this particular quote, Nugent is responding to the Educational Guidance in Human Love, Outlines for Sex Education released by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Educators on Nov. 1, 1983. The committee was headed by Cardinal William Baum of Washington, D.C. and overall the guide was not
particularly damaging but not helpful either for the controversial subject on homosexuality in the U.S. Catholic Church.

35 “Miami Resolution” passed by the House of Delegates at Dignity/USA’s Eighth Biennial Convention, July 23-26, 1987. Dignity also releases its own “letter on the Pastoral Care of Gay and Lesbian Persons” the same year.


38 Nugent and Gramick were never investigated for doctrinal or theological issues, thus the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) was not involved. However, they found out accidentally that the investigation had been turned over to the CDF when Sr. Patricia Flynn went to consult with somebody about Gramick and Nugent and he let it slip that the case had been turned over to the CDF. Gramick, Nugent, or their leaders were officially informed of the CDF’s involvement.

39 Collins, 140.

40 For a superb account Gramick and Nugent’s silencing and the implications for the church, see Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Silencing of Nugent, Gramick Sets a Novel Standard of Orthodoxy,” America, August 14-21, 1999. The history of Gramick, Nugent, and NWM from 1988-1999 deserves the attention of an entire dissertation. I have chosen not to document this period in detail, because I am interested in how they succeeded for so long. The “golden years” of Catholic gay ministry might not have been long enough, but it lasted for quite a bit longer than other controversial issues over the nature of descent.

41 As explained in Chapter 3, Gramick, Nugent, and New Ways Ministry were under constant suspicion from the CRSI for over twenty-five years.


43 “Statement of Francis DeBernardo, Executive Director of New Ways Ministry, on the Vatican's Silencing of Sister Jeannine Gramick, SSND, and Father Robert Nugent, SDS, the co-founders of New Ways Ministry” New Ways Ministry (26 May 2000) http://mysite.verizon.net/~vze43yrc/vatican.html#nwm


45 Collins, The Modern Inquisition, 151.

46 Nugent assented to the ruling and has taken his ministry in a different direction.

48 Jeannine Gramick, *Journey to the Light*, edited by Linda Jones and Sophie Stanes (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2003), 130. See also Barbara Rick’s film *In Good Conscience*.

49 “Statement from Sister Jeannine Gramick” *New Ways Ministry* (25 May 2000)  
http://mysite.verizon.net/~vze43yrc/jg000525.html


52 John Rivera, “Nun silenced by Vatican transfers to new order Barred from ministry to gays, she joins Denver-based community” *Baltimore Sun* 21 Sept 2001.


54 For example, Michael Cuneo, *The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997). This is also a critique of queer theory. Some scholars propose queer theory focuses too much on subversion (often in the form of satire) at the expense of political engagement.

55 This is especially true when revisionist historians “uncovered” gay and lesbian history by casting historical subjects as “gay” or “lesbian.” Scholars would now consider the historical situatedness of the subjects and the locus of their social and cultural positioning which shaped their understanding of sexuality. More importantly, the focus shifted to the how the production of identities were created, sustained, or destabilized.

56 Comstock and Henking make the same point in the introduction to *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Gary David Comstock and Susan E. Henking (New York: Continuum, 1999), 11.


59 Fulkerson, “Gender—Being It or Doing It?” 200.

60 Fulkerson’s critique would be “This discourse, however, does not expose the constructed and unstable nature of all sexual configurations,” 197.


62 Theorists are well aware of the danger of lessening the radical nature and political effectiveness of queer projects if they are normalized, even into an academic discipline. See David Halperin, *Saint


64 Queer theory is heavily dependent on the work of Michel Foucault and later Judith Butler. For instance, see David Halperin, Saint Foucault, Towards a Gay Hagiography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). While theorist Judith Butler’s writings are numerous, Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990) is attributed to initiating ideas about gender performativity and notions of queer.


66 As noted in chapter 1, while there are definitely reform movements inclusive of a range of sexualities and therefore more realistic in defining themselves as LGBT(Q), for the most part within Catholic reform organizations, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, same-sex desire was classified as homosexual, gay, or gay and lesbian. I use the language my sources used to reflect the authenticity of their language used in context.


69 Mary McClintock Fulkerson, “Gender—Being It or Doing It?” in Que(e)rying Religion, edited by Comstock and Henking, 1999, 194.

70 For a discussion of this theology of hope in conjunction with political theology, see McCarthy, The Catholic Tradition, 262-263.

71 On contact zones, or boarderlands more specifically, has been used within queer theory (not to mention history and religion). See Gloria Anzaldu, La Frontera/Borderlands, 2nd edition (Aunt Lute Books, 1999).


75 See Judith Butler, Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), 14-16, for a discussion on utopian, coalitional politics.

76 Martin Marty’s two party system of classifying private and public Protestants is helpful. However, I would extend the typology to Catholicism as well, especially the activist strain relating to economic
justice, such as the Catholic Action and Catholic Worker movements. Progressive Protestant traditions as well have a long history of benevolent societies and activism in the social realm as opposed to more private pursuits concerned with the individual salvation of the world. Martin Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York, NY: Harper Row, 1970).


79 Edward Freeman to the Very Rev. Myron Wagner, SDS, 29 Jan. 1979, S1 Box 3: Communities-Gay Religion Correspondence and Info, 1978-1979, NWM Collection, Marquette University Library.


CONCLUSION:

1 Gramick and Furey, eds. *The Vatican and Homosexuality,* xiii-xiv.


3 Jones and Stanes, *Journey to the Light,* 130.


5 Curb and Manahan, Lesbian Nuns: *Breaking the Silence.*
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