



Nun named to RWF board

by Seth Hemmelgarn

The Catholic nun who has spent more than 30 years advocating for gays and lesbians – even after the pope ordered her to stop – recently joined Rainbow World Fund's board of directors.

The Rainbow World Fund is an LGBT and friends-based humanitarian services agency headquartered in the Castro.

Sister Jeannine Gramick said the community should support Rainbow World Fund as goodwill ambassadors. When events such as the recent earthquake in Peru occur, Rainbow World Fund quickly jumps in to help, raising money and collecting materials that are then distributed to those in need.

"I immediately accepted this invitation because I believe wholeheartedly in the philosophy and mission of the Rainbow World Fund," Gramick wrote in an e-mail. "It seeks to help all people in need, regardless of sexual orientation."

Jeff Cotter, Rainbow World Fund's executive director, asked her to be on the board while Gramick was traveling with the group on its July trip to Guatemala. She will be a guest at a private reception the organization is holding.

The five-person board meets two to three times a year. The positions are non-paid.

"We need more people like Jeannine Gramick in the world," Cotter wrote in an e-mail. Gramick, 65, was part of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in 1971 when she became friends with a gay man who'd been in a religious order but left because he felt "incompatible." Gramick started ministering to gays and lesbians and, in 1977, she co-founded the New Ways Ministry. The ministry promotes acceptance of LGBT people in the church and in society.

The Vatican eventually ordered the School Sisters of Notre Dame to investigate Gramick, which it did – three times. Each time, Gramick said, they found she was doing good work.

Finally, the Vatican conducted its own investigation. In 1999, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who's now Pope Benedict XVI, wrote an order for her to

stop her efforts. Pope John Paul II signed the order. Over the next year, Gramick spoke publicly about the investigation and asked people to write the Vatican for reconsideration. She said "tens of thousands or even more" letters were sent. But in 2000, the Vatican had the School Sisters of Notre Dame order Gramick to stop. The group's leadership had changed, and this time the sisters cooperated. Gramick soon joined the Sisters of Loretto.

Seven years later, she still refuses to be silent.

"No one, not even the Vatican, can tell me what I can say and what I can't say," she said in a phone interview with the *Bay Area Reporter*.

Gramick encourages people to feel at home in the church and take advantage of the spirituality available there.

"It's your inheritance," she said. "No one can take that away from you."

Karen N. Kai, an independent research and writing consultant, and community activist also recently joined the organization's board. Among other positions, Kai is a former chair of the San Francisco Human Rights Commission.

The other board members are Cotter, Bradford Hubert, and Dr. Lisa Capaldini.

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