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Loretto Sr. Jeannine Gramick speaking on "The Vatican Briefing" podcast about meeting with Pope Francis on Oct. 17 (NCR photo/Joshua J. McElwee)



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For decades, Loretto Sr. Jeannine Gramick has operated at the margins of the global Catholic Church because of her devotion to ministry with LGBTQ Catholics. But on Oct. 17, she was welcomed into the Vatican for an historic 50-minute meeting with Pope Francis.

In an exclusive interview with National Catholic Reporter some 18 hours after the papal encounter, Gramick said Francis "has a warmth and a wanting to embrace everyone, not just LGBT people but those who have been shunned by society and the church."

"I think Pope Francis is trying to get us to move forward, to open our eyes and look to the future and to the changes in the world," she said.



Loretto Sr. Jeannine Gramick posing with items given to her by Pope Francis, during their meeting together on Oct. 17 (NCR photo/Joshua J. McElwee)

Gramick, who spoke to NCR for a special episode of The Vatican Briefing podcast, also revealed some of the small details of what it is like to meet the pope at his residence, the Vatican's Casa Santa Marta. She said that when she and three staffers from her organization, New Ways Ministry, arrived for the meeting, they were ushered to several chairs arranged in a circle.

"I pulled my chair closer to his, because I didn't like that arrangement," Gramick said, chuckling lightly. "It was a fine arrangement, but not close enough. And then we just began to chat. It was really quite homey."

The sister, who has struck up a correspondence with Francis in recent years, said seeing him in person for the first time "was like two people who have been pen pals … across the ocean, who have never met each other, and then meet."

"It's just exciting, it's moving, it's being with a friend," she said.

Related: Pope Francis meets Jeannine Gramick, US sister known for LGBTQ ministry

New Ways Ministry was co-founded by Gramick and the late Salvatorian Fr. Robert Nugent in 1977. Through the years, it has been the subject of rebuke from both Vatican and American Catholic officials.

In 1999, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the head of the Vatican's doctrinal office and the future Pope Benedict XVI, prohibited Gramick and Nugent from any pastoral work with LGBTQ persons, due to alleged "errors and ambiguities" in their work.

Asked how she understood the significance of her now meeting with Francis, Gramick said: "I explain it really as the working of the Holy Spirit."

"I attribute this to the work of the Spirit, in electing someone like Pope Francis, who really is a man of God," she said.

The special episode of "The Vatican Briefing" featuring NCR's full interview with Gramick about her meeting with Francis is available below. You can also subscribe to the podcast on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or however you listen to podcasts.

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Relevant links for this week's episode:

- Joshua McElwee's initial coverage of Pope Francis' meeting with Loretto Sr. Jeannine Gramick: Pope Francis meets Jeannine Gramick, US sister known for LGBTQ ministry;
- Christopher White's coverage of the 2023 Synod of Bishops' debates on gay Catholics: LGBTQ Catholics subject of emotional debate at synod, participants say;
- Christopher White's coverage of German Cardinal Gerhard Muller's interview with EWTN: German Cardinal Müller defies pope's request for confidentiality at synod with EWTN interview;
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