Sexuality shouldn’t be taboo topic

After my February column about a new book on lesbian nuns appeared on Ni.com and The Jersey Journal, I decided to batton down the hatches and prepare for incoming fire. But nary a nasty e-mail nor a terrible tweet was lobbed. On a phone call, someone made an aside reference insinuating, “Is nothing sacred?”

Then an e-mail arrived from one of the nuns featured in “Love Tenderly,” the recent book published by New Ways Ministry, a Catholic LGBTQ advocacy group.

“I wrote my story under a pseudonym and I appreciate your taking the time to write such a thoughtful, even tender, review,” she said. “It certainly is filled with sacred stories!”

Then I received a letter from a nun — correctly a “woman religious” or “sister” — I have known for decades who was not happy that the column had appeared in a secular newspaper.

“She offered that other sisters and lay people had contacted her, coupled with the press releasing potential sex abuse, writing about lesbian nuns, she said, “seems to worsen the situation in the eyes of many of the faithful.”

“I suspect she represents what many readers might have felt and did not want to express. After women religious have different takes on the topic. “I would say there is still a lot of silence around sexuality in religious life,” said Blavetzki.

Dominican Sister Arlene Flaherty.

Through the years, though, she has noticed significant change.

“Religious formation over the past 40 years has done fairly well in trying to integrate sexuality, spirituality, and the loves (or) attempts to avoid the process of identifying as a sexual being is a lot harder to do whatever is your sexual orientation,” she said.

Loretto Sister Jeannine Gramick, the one U.S. sister who has done the most to promote LGBT acceptance in the Catholic church and co-founded New Ways Ministry, echoed Flaherty.

“It (the column) explains well the difference in perceptions and acceptance of lesbian women in religious life now, as contrasted with 35 years ago when the first book about lesbian nuns appeared,” she said. “The times have changed and so has the knowledge about sexuality on the part of most segments of U.S. society.

Gramick has endured significant pushback from the Vatican and Catholic bishops but is unwavering. She wrote the forward to “Love Tenderly.”

“Many in the Catholic community believe that an honest and transparent on the topic is the best approach,” she said.

“Wanting to keep such discussions out of the public forum is the same kind of thinking that causes lay people to be suspicious of the church, causing the public to believe or suspect untrue situations or situations being worse than they are,” said Madlene Cunningham of Cardston, my cousin, who was educated in Catholic institutions through graduate school, where she earned a degree in rehabilitation counselling.

“Are we trying to be a church open and transparent?”

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