

Life Faith



COURTESY OF HOLY ROSARY CHURCH

MADE OF wood, wire and paper, the walk-through tomb of Jesus at Holy Rosary Church in Jersey City on display through May 23.

'Tomb of Jesus' recreated in Hudson church

BY MARGARET SCHMIDT
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The pastor of Holy Rosary Church in Jersey City would love to take all of his parishioners to the Holy Land, especially during the Easter season, to experience the places at the root of their Catholic faith.

With annual pilgrimages an impossibility, though, the Rev. Jerzy (Jurek) Zaslona decided to bring a piece of Jerusalem to the parish in a way by creating a walk-through tomb of Jesus inside the church.

First put up nine years ago, the tomb is made of wood, wire and paper and has lights inside to illuminate it. It was constructed by church employees.

The tomb is on display through Pentecost, the Christian commemoration of the Holy Spirit's descent on Jesus' apostles, which closes the Easter season and falls on May 23 this year.

The church, located at 344 Sixth St. in the city's Downtown neighborhood, is open daily from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., and visitors are welcome to go and experience the creation.

For information, call 201-795-0120.

Sexuality shouldn't be taboo topic

After my February column about a new book on lesbian nuns appeared on NJ.com and in The Jersey Journal, I decided to batten 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 LGBT 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-

Rev. Alexander M. Santora
Faith Matters

people had contacted her. Coupled with the press exposing clerical sexual 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.

But other women religious have different takes on the topic. "I would say there is still a lot of silence around sexuality in religious life," said Blauvelt Dominican Sister Arlene Flaherty.

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

"Religious formation over the



COURTESY OF SISTER JEANNINE GRAMICK

SISTER JEANNINE Gramick, a member of the Sisters of Loreto, co-founded New Ways Ministry, a Catholic LGBT advocacy group.

past 40 years has done fairly well in trying to integrate sexuality, spirituality, and the vows (so) 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 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 unbowed. She wrote the forward to "Love Tenderly."

Many in the Catholic community believe that an honest transparency on the topic is the best approach.

"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

seminary classmate, asked rhetorically. "This is not a surprise topic or issue for folks. This is 2021 and we have to be upfront about who we are as Gospel-oriented disciples of the Lord."

"This is the issue with the religious community. Sweep issues under the rug," said Nicholas St. George of Asbury Park, recently retired as a counselor at Mercy Center in the same town.

"I was surprised that it was not the content of your article but that it appeared in the secular press" that led to the criticism, a woman religious from Bergen County said.

She mentioned that publishing in the secular press can reach a wider audience.

And Cunningham added that religious publications are not necessarily as honest, straightforward and unbiased as the secular press can be.

A number of religious congregations are now planning programs about sexuality, LGBTQ issues, diversity, and the intersectionality of oppressions, Gramick noted.

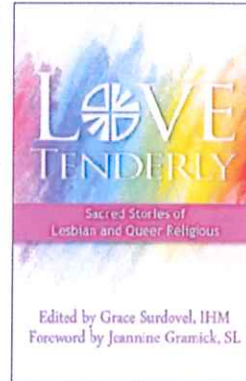
"This book has ignited a spark that was ready to burst into flame," she said.

Flaherty got to the heart of the issue.

"Sexuality," she said, "no matter whose it is, will always get sensationalized. Put this reality together with people's outdated image of nuns, the taboo that encircles this topic, and the 'dis-ease' that many men and women religious continue to experience in congregational discussion about sexuality, and you can understand why this topic is easy to misrepresent and blow out of proportion."

She considers the creation of spaces for open and respectful discussion and reflection on human sexuality, especially within the church community, "a way of living the gospel of justice."

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"LOVE TENDERLY: Sacred Stories of Lesbian and Queer Religious" is out now this year from New Ways Ministry press.

untrue situations or situations being worse than they are," said Marlene Cunningham of Carlstadt, my cousin, who was educated in Catholic institutions through graduate school, where she earned a degree in rehabilitation counseling.

"Aren't we trying to be as church open and transparent?" the Rev. Robert Bourcy, pastor of St. Catherine of Siena Church in Mendon, New York, and my