

March 10, 1986
Rome, Italy

Dear Sisters of the North American Provinces,

I write to you regarding the situation of our Sisters, Jeannine Gramick and Margaret Ellen Traxler, and the signing of the statement on pluralism and abortion and appeared as a New York Times ad. Sisters Margaret Ellen and Jeannine, their provincial leaders, Sisters Maureen Murray and Patricia Flynn respectively, and I have met on many occasions to try to resolve this matter. During my recent visit to the United States I had the opportunity to meet Sisters Jeannine and Margaret Ellen on various occasions, both one-to-one and with different groups.

From the beginning it has been clear that in signing the ad both sisters desired and intended to state only that there is a diversity of opinion among Catholics regarding the matter of abortion and to call for dialogue and clarification on this matter. Both signed the ad during the presidential campaign in the United States because the matter of abortion was made an important issue in the campaign. It has also been clear from the beginning that in the action of signing the ad neither sister intended or wished to act contrary to the church or to give scandal.

As Sisters Patricia Flynn, Maureen Murray, and I wrote in our February 12, 1986, letter to you, Cardinal Hamer of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, has indicated that the matter of the signing of the statement would be closed if 1) I would have objective assurance that the signer adheres to the authentic teaching of the church on abortion and 2) this fact would be communicated to the members of the signer's province or congregation.

I have written statements from Sisters Margaret Ellen and Jeannine as well as oral statements made in my presence and in the presence of their respective provincial councils that serve as objective assurance for me that both sisters adhere to the authentic teaching of the Catholic Church on abortion. I use this letter as a means of communicating this information to you. The letter that I received from Cardinal Hamer on March 7, 1986, indicates that this letter to you officially closes the situation for Sisters Jeannine and Margaret Ellen.

Thank you for your prayer for all of us involved in this situation. I ask your continued prayer that, for the common good of the entire church, this matter be brought to closure for all signers of the statement.

Gratefully and prayerfully,
Sister Mary Margaret Johanning, SSND
General Superior