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Remembering a great woman and role model

Maureen Fiedler | Dec. 26, 2012 NCR Today

When I first met Bishop Jane Holmes Dixon, we had an informal lunch and talked about her groundbreaking role as the first woman Episcopal Bishop of Washington, D.C., and the second woman bishop in the United States, following Bishop Barbara Harris of Massachusetts.

We talked about the fact that women can?t even be deacons in the Catholic church (yet), but she pointed out that no struggles for gender equality are easy. Catholic women, she believed, would eventually be accepted into all levels of the priesthood.

Jane understood well her own pioneer role, saying at a press conference on the day of her consecration in 1992, ?I am a symbol of the inclusiveness of God.?

Those were the days when women could become bishops in the Episcopal Church, but were not yet universally accepted. Jane had to deal with a couple recalcitrant parishes that refused to welcome her, situations which she handled with grace, courage and conviction.

She was known as a struggler for justice, peace and the inclusion of everyone in her church. She was a champion of the rights of LGBT people.

Likewise, she was a leader in promoting good interfaith relations, dialogue and collaboration among all traditions, something that became her focus when she worked at the Interfaith Alliance. When we celebrated the 10th anniversary of Interfaith Voices this past spring, she was delighted to be one of the speakers, and I was grateful she accepted.

It was she who led the National Day of Prayer at the Washington National Cathedral following the tragedy of 9/11.

There is something both sad and significant about the fact that she left this world on Christmas Day. Her death was unexpected, a shock to her family and friends. Yet, this woman of light left this world in a season of light. This time, for her, it?s Christmas in heaven?

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