NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

A gift to Presbyterians that Catholics should be able to enjoy

Bill Tammeus | Jan. 9, 2013 A small c catholic

For much of the 1980s, I served on a committee that guides people seeking to become Presbyterian pastors.

At the time, women were beginning to make serious cracks in Protestantism's stained-glass ceiling, and perhaps half the seminarians under our committee's care then were female. (It's probably higher today.)

Despite a growing number of women candidates, everyone knew then there still were a few members of our presbytery [1], or regional governing body, who opposed ordaining women. So before I introduced one such woman at a presbytery meeting so members could question her before voting on whether to proceed with ordination, she and I talked about how to respond to any naysayers.

In the end, we decided to let him (there turned out to be just one) have his say and to reply, simply, that the way to read what seems to be the Apostle Paul's insistence that women be quiet in church is through the lens of Galatians 3:28 [2], where he writes that there no longer are slave or free, male or female, Jew or Greek, but all are one in Christ Jesus. (She passed, by the way, and has served well as a pastor ever since.)

I recalled that experience when I read *NCR [3]*'s recent editorial [3] advocating the ordination of women as Catholic priests.

As a small-c but not a big-C catholic, I, of course, have to watch this debate from the outside and leave it up to the Catholic church to make its own decision.

But I can tell Catholics that by not having female priests, they are being short-changed, and I wish Catholics were able to experience the blessings of female clergy I have. (At the moment, my congregation's [4] two pastors are male, though we have many women in other important roles.)

I don't want you to think that we Presbyterians [5] have been the most progressive leaders on the matter of ordaining women. Oh, we began ordaining women as elders (an elective office of congregational leadership) a bit over 100 years ago, but we didn't ordain our first female pastor until 1956.

That pioneer, the Rev. Margaret Towner [6], is now in her late 80s and living in Florida. Although retired, she continues to be active in church affairs in various ways. This is the Margaret who asked me in an email just recently, "Are the Roman Catholics any closer to ordination (of women)?"

No, but today's Presbyterian church is full of Margaret Towners.

One such Margaret was Melinda, an associate pastor of my late parents' congregation in Illinois [7]. She became a close friend and caregiver for my mother as Mom moved toward death in the mid-1990s. Melinda incarnated God's healing presence for both Mom and Dad in many ways.

The first Margaret in my congregation was Ilona, whose youthful enthusiasm was inspiring, even if it needed occasional reining in. Then there was Glaucia, a native of Brazil, who gave us new eyes for music and taught us

what exegesis meant and why it was so crucial to the preaching task. A later Margaret was beautiful Catherine, who connected deeply with the children of the church, drawing on her previous acting career to link creativity with a profound love for the Gospel.

Chris is the Margaret who serves as senior pastor for my youngest sister's congregation [8] in Illinois. Chris is a wonderful writer and preacher who leads with both confidence and humility. My sister periodically sends me excellent sermons Chris has preached.

Women religious fill some of these roles in Catholic churches, as do other women lay leaders. But it's my understanding that the church views such women as separate from priests and unequal to them.

Presbyterian women pastors sometimes continue to find roadblocks in their career path. But less and less are they seen as either separate or unequal. And I wish my Catholic brothers and sisters could experience the gifts that such Margarets have to offer.

[Bill Tammeus, a Presbyterian elder and former award-winning Faith columnist for *The Kansas City Star*, writes the daily "Faith Matters" blog [9] for the *Star*'s website and a monthly column for *The Presbyterian Outlook*. His latest book, co-authored with Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, is *They Were Just People: Stories of Rescue in Poland During the Holocaust [10]*. Email him at wtammeus@kc.rr.com [11].]

Editor's note: We can send you an email alert every time Bill Tammeus' column, "A small c catholic," is posted to NCRonline.org. Go to this page and follow directions: Email alert sign-up [12].

Source URL (retrieved on *09/15/2014 - 05:49*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/small-c-catholic/gift-presbyterians-catholics-should-be-able-enjoy

Links:
[1] http://heartlandpby.org/
[2] http://www.usccb.org/bible/galatians/3/
[3] http://ncronline.org/news/people/editorial-ordination-women-would-correct-injustice
[4] http://www.secondpres.org/
[5] http://www.pcusa.org/
[6] http://apps.pcusa.org/ga217/newsandphotos/ga06066.htm
[7] http://www.fpcwoodstock.org/FPCW-Web/DesktopDefault.aspx
[8] http://www.firstchurchlf.org/
[9] http://billtammeus.typepad.com/
[10] http://www.amazon.com/They-Were-Just-People-Holocaust/dp/0826218601/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1299296756&sr=1-1
[11] mailto:wtammeus@kc.rr.com
[12] http://ncronline.org/email-alert-signup