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Women leaders in the Curia essential for church survival

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Women heading offices in the Curia. Sounds crazy, right? Well, maybe. But when I'm wistful, I think about the possibilities and what a difference they would make: Elizabeth Johnson -- or Margaret Farley, or maybe Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara -- appointed to lead the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. No more anathemas. In fact, it might mean no more doctrinal congregation. They might advise the pope to abolish this relic of the Inquisition as useless and alienating in the 21st-century church.

Think of other possibilities. Former Irish president and human rights activist Mary Robinson might lead the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Or Pat Farrell, past president of LCWR, could head the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. (OK, this last idea might be really remote, but why not dream big?)

What a difference such women would make. Not just because they are women, of course, but because they understand the church as the People of God, not as hierarchy. They value open inquiry and creative thinking about the Catholic tradition.

But most importantly, the appointment of women to such leadership roles would break a barrier that must be removed for the church to have any chance for relevance in the 21st century.

So maybe these dreams need to become reality. The appointment of women to leadership at the international level is essential for the survival and flourishing of the church moving forward.

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