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Patriarchy writ large at papal conclave

Maureen Fiedler | Mar. 1, 2013 NCR Today
Conclave 2013

On Thursday morning, I was a guest on the Diane Rehm Show, which airs on NPR stations across the nation. The topic was, of course, the departure of Pope Benedict XVI, the latest in scandal news swirling around the Vatican, and the coming conclave.

One of the questions surfacing on the show and in many interviews (including the ones I do on Interfaith Voices) is this: What qualities are needed in the new pope?

Many guests say we need someone who can "clean house" at the Vatican, aka get the Roman Curia into shape. Others talk about the need for a good communicator, and someone who can teach the gospel effectively in the 21st century.

More and more, my answer is this: someone who is willing to renounce patriarchy.

That means someone who could, and would, inaugurate a "Council of the People of God" for the church. This would not be a council of bishops like Vatican II. Yes, it would include bishops and priests, but it would be composed mainly of lay people -- women as well as men -- from all the cultures and continents of the world.

Done right, think of what a glorious gathering that might be!

And as I watch what's unfolding in Rome, I believe I am watching the final states of a dying patriarchy. The pompous costumes, the rituals, the all-male decision makers are straight out of the courts of Europe in the 17th or 18th centuries.

And then I look at those who will vote in the conclave: no women, no married people, no one from a younger generation.

This cannot last if the church is to have the least bit of relevance in the 21st century. Wasn't it Vatican II that said "the church is the People of God?"

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