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Jesuit suggests female cardinals, asks for names

Joshua J. McElwee | Sep. 24, 2013 NCR Today

A noted U.S. Jesuit priest and theologian has taken to Facebook to propose a key change in the structure of the Catholic church: the naming of women to the College of Cardinals, the elite church body responsible for electing the pope.

Posting Tuesday on his personal Facebook page, Jesuit Fr. James Keenan asked his friends and associates to propose names of women around the world who should be considered as possible cardinal candidates.

"I have been getting lots of likes from all over when I said that I think making a woman a cardinal is a very easy matter, why?" asks Keenan, who holds the founders professorship in theology at Boston College. "Because there are so many good candidates!"

"Should we not use social networking to put some names out there?" he asks, suggesting people mention women not from their own country that might make good cardinals.

Cardinals, sometimes known as the "princes of the church" and for their wearing of red vestments, are personally named by the pope. They are usually senior Catholic prelates who serve either as archbishops in the world's largest dioceses' or in the Vatican's central bureaucracy.

After a pope's death or renunciation of the papal office, cardinals are also responsible for governing the church until they meet together in a secret conclave to elect the next pontiff.

As cardinals are not ordained into their ministry, some have suggested that it would be possible for the church to name women as cardinals without changing the church's teaching regarding the ordination of only men to the priesthood.

While canon law currently specifies that a cardinal must either be a priest or a bishop, some have also wondered whether the appointment of female cardinals might be a reform Pope Francis is considering.

If that were to happen, women among those on Keenan's list are: Linda Hogan, a professor of ecumenics at Trinity College Dublin; Holy Child Jesus Sr. Teresa Okure, a theology professor at the Catholic Institute of West Africa in Nigeria; and Maryanne Loughry, the associate director of the Jesuit Refugee Service in Australia.

At least one prominent current cardinal has already suggested the naming of female cardinals could be possible.

According to *U.S Catholic* [1], New York's Archbishop Timothy Dolan said in an interview last year it was "theoretically" possible for the pope to name female cardinals.

"I?ve heard it from more than one person that one time somebody said to Blessed John Paul II, ?You should make Mother Teresa of Calcutta a cardinal,?" Dolan, who also heads the U.S. bishops' conference, states in the interview.

"The pope said, ?I asked her, she doesn?t want to be one.,'" Dolan said.

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