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Another crack in the stained glass ceiling

Maureen Fiedler | Aug. 27, 2013 NCR Today

It happened again: A woman has been elected to the top leadership position in her denomination. This month, Elizabeth Eaton was chosen in a landslide as presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She joins Katharine Jefferts Schori of the Episcopal Church USA and Sharon Watkins of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as a woman leading a major Christian denomination. I must note: The world has not come to an end as a result.

These denominations have overcome the patriarchal theological and biblical obstacles that have long been used to prevent women from holding major leadership positions in religious denominations. With women at the helm, these churches are faring as well, if not better, than any denomination headed by a male.

But here we Catholics are without women deacons or priests, much less bishops. And this policy is becoming more and more embarrassing by the day.

After all, it was a woman, Mary of Nazareth, who first brought the body and blood of Christ to earth. It was a woman, Mary Magdalene, who was first commissioned to preach the resurrection. It was Jesus himself who called both women and men to ministry. Women led house churches in early centuries and presided at Eucharists. (There is evidence in the catacombs.)

Many Catholics know this. So when pseudo-biblical scholars and pseudo-theologians cite reasons why the ordination of women is not possible, these Catholics just laugh. Such arguments no longer make sense to them, if they ever did.

Pope Francis may think that Pope John Paul II closed the door on this issue. But Pope John XXIII opened lots of windows in the church to let in the fresh air, so surely, Francis can open a door or two.

Then perhaps one day, we will see a headline for the first woman Catholic bishop. Now that will be news.

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