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## 'The Beer Drinker's Guide to God'

by Maureen Fiedler

NCR Today

I know this title sounds crazy but that's what I thought when a book by the same name arrived in our office. The author is an Episcopal priest, Rev. William Miller, who pastors a church and owns a bar at the same time. The name of the bar? Padre's. Makes sense, Why not?

After booking him for an interview on Interfaith Voices, I began thinking: what a great way to improve ecumenical relations. Have a beer with whomever (as long, of course, as they are not members of a religious body that objects to drinking -- like Mormons, Baptists, Methodists or Muslims -- and there are more. The list is longer than I thought).

But neither Episcopalians nor Catholics are teetotalers, so this ecumenical interview moved apace. The first question I asked Miller was this: "You run a church and a bar. Are there similarities?" Not surprisingly, his answer was "Yes." He proceeded to mention an atmosphere of acceptance, moments of transcendence (it's all in how you define "transcendence," I suspect), people looking for community, "a potent sacramental beverage," and often great music. Sometimes, he added, there are moments of confession. Both are places where "everybody knows your name."

But, I queried, wasn't wine the biblical or sacramental beverage? Why all this stuff about beer? Well, he answered, beer is the beverage of the ordinary person, the perfect drink when you ask, "Can we have a beer together?"

In the book, he has some memorable lines. He mentions a trip he made to Ireland, where he talks about Dubliners? boasting about their three cathedrals: St. Patrick?s Cathedral, Christ Church Cathedral and the Guinness Brewery. He quotes Scripture a great deal (The author used lots of ?wine? quotes. He may like beer, but doesn?t have anything against wine) and even St. Brigit of Kildare: ?I should like a great lake of finest ale for the King of kings.? The saints he knows were definitely not teetotalers.

He does recognize that alcohol is not for everyone. I did question him seriously about the real problems some people have with alcohol, and he noted that he has often worked with Alcoholics Anonymous to help people with addictions.

But for those without problems, ?having a beer? is a great way to enjoy a life ?in the Spirit? and ?in the spirits.? No contradiction. Miller is a delightful human being who believes that we need to appreciate, and live with, the joyful things in life. When he gets to the Washington, D.C., area some time, we plan to have a beer together.

Here is the link to our interview: [http://interfaithradio.org/Story\\_Details/So\\_a\\_Priest\\_Walks\\_into\\_a\\_Bar](http://interfaithradio.org/Story_Details/So_a_Priest_Walks_into_a_Bar).

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