

A **Rev!** interview With Janine Tartaglia Metcalf

*Rev! caught up with a small but spunky woman who used to be a popular newscaster in Southern California, until she had an encounter with God which changed her life. Janine Tartaglia Metcalf is the senior pastor of El Cajon Church of the Nazarene, a long-established congregation that's experiencing a renaissance under her leadership. The church ministers to people in a middle-low-economic suburb on the east, non-tourist side of San Diego.*

**Rev!:** Tell us how you came to faith?

**Metcalf:** I'd been a TV reporter anchorwoman for about nine years throughout California. I was working in Los Angeles for KNBC at the time, doing a story on the Iran Hostage Crisis—where the Ayatola Khomeini held 52 hostages in Iran for 444 days.

During the crisis I came to know a pastor who was a father of one of the hostages. His name was Earle Lee and his wife was Hazel. I'd go over to their home and interview them. I saw something about them that was so genuine, a faith that exuded peace and a courage.

Pastor Lee used to say, “How could this happen to our son? Why could this happen to us?” He finally determined that “whys” will eventually kill you. He chose to trust God with his son and tomorrow and to live a life that “I have God’s will and peace for today.” I saw that lived out in the way he prayed.

After our interviews he’d interview *me*. When the cameras weren’t rolling he’d ask me, “Janine, how are you doing? Do you have a faith?”

And I’d say, “Well, I’m a Roman Catholic, kind of?”

“Well do you know Jesus Christ?” he’d ask.

“Well, yes I do, I do. I’ve grown up with 12 years of Catholic school. I know the Lord, but he’s more of an acquaintance.”

Eventually there was something about being around Earle and Hazel that caused me to ask the question, “What do I do with Jesus?”

I covered the story for 10 months. They kept inviting me to church. I didn’t go. I made up every excuse in the book, “No, I can’t come.”

In time I did come. It was a Sunday that many of us felt the hostages would either be killed or released—when Ronald Reagan was going to be inaugurated. We hadn’t heard from Gary Lee for several months. We didn’t know if he was still alive. I eventually went to church because if anything broke in the story I wanted to be at the church and get the reaction of the people, either elation or heartbreak. I was up in the balcony with 20-30 other TV, newspaper, and radio reporters.

In the middle of that particular service, Jan. 18, 1985, I heard a passage of Scripture, Isaiah 33, verses 1 and 2: “Fear not, for I have redeemed thee. I have called thee by name. Thou art mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee. When you walk through the fires, the flames will not consume thee, for I am the Lord your God, your Savior.”

I was absolutely overwhelmed. I put down my notebook. There was no invitation. I wouldn't know what to do with it if there was. I stood up in the middle of the service. My cameraman was watching and he said, “What do you want us to shoot?” I said, “No, something's happening to me.” Jim looked and said, “Oh no, what?” I said, “I don't know. I don't know.” I was overwhelmed with awe.

In the presence of God I didn't know what to say except, “I'm sorry. I'm sorry for putting everything and everybody else before you. I'm sorry.” It was a great morning because there was such faith in the church. They were singing “Glory, glory, hallelujah.” There was an incredible sense of joy. Pastor Lee always said, “Janine, if you ever come to church, I'll get out my trumpet and play.” He saw me in the balcony, and he sent for somebody to go to the office and grab his trumpet, and he played for me. I lifted my hands up to heaven, and I was in such incredible awe of the joy of God.

A few days later, Gary comes home, in the middle of the inauguration service. As Jimmy Carter left office, the hostages were released. We didn't know he was alive until he gets off the plane in Algiers. He had long hair and Hazel almost fell off the couch, and said, "He looks like Jesus." She was just overwhelmed with Joy.

Gary came home a free person, a free man. And I came out of that story a free woman of God.

**Rev!:** What took place after that?

**Metcalf:** I always knew, even as a Roman Catholic, that I had a special thing with the Lord. I used to talk to him. I had a sense of his love and friendship in my life. A nun had given me a New Testament, and I read it and sensed a Presence. When I came to the Church of the Nazarene and found out that a lady could pursue a call in pastoral work, I was so blessed. It was like the answer to years of longing and searching.

I was a TV newscaster, getting awards and making a lot of money, doing pretty well as a 28- and 29-year-old. My mom asked, "What is it you want to do in your life?" I said, "I want to do something for Jesus, but I don't know what it is."

Then to be in a denomination that would allow me to pursue a call and use my gifts to their fullest capacity, this is about the most incredible answer to many years of waiting. I sensed the Lord was calling me to share a different kind of news—to do that I needed to know the him and really spend time studying the Word.

I went back to school, to seminary, in my 30s, and began work at Pasadena First Church, serving a large group of senior adults, to offer ministry to them and through them at the church. God gave me a vision to develop a ministry where the seniors are engaged in meaningful service, and it blossomed. We had senior adults working all over the church and the community, reaching out. I saw people find Christ in their 80s and 90s. I was there for nine years.

I sensed a calling to be an evangelist, so after nine years as a staff pastor, I went around the country for three years and preached in camp meetings, revivals, campuses, and churches. Along the way I met a wonderful man of God and married Ed Metcalf. His wife had died of cancer. I became the instant mom of two teenage sons.

Ed and I moved to San Diego where I served as a faculty member of our religion department at PLNU, where I taught Christian education and other courses. All along I sensed a desire to pastor a church. It took me a long time to make that decision.

**Rev!:** Why was it challenging to make that decision?

**Metcalf:** I knew I'd need a special kind of unction to take that step as a woman, to be a senior shepherd. It's one thing to be a staff pastor. It's another when God has called you to shepherd a whole body of believers. The responsibilities are different. But the burden is light because when the call is secure, it's so fulfilling, and the love that God gives and the strength that God gives more than makes up for my lackings. I sensed the presence of the Spirit at work in my life.

In our denomination, we have a polity in which pastors are called, not assigned. It's a combination of the call of the shepherd, the work of a district superintendent, the church board working conjunction with the pastor and district superintendent, and eventually the vote of the entire congregation.

A week before the vote, a person sent a letter to members in the church, telling them that a vote for a woman as a senior shepherd wasn't consistent with biblical teaching and that this should never happen. It's interesting how I responded to that. I don't take that rhetoric lightly. But it almost confirmed the call.

**Rev!:** How did people respond to that?

**Metcalf:** The church voted overwhelmingly to call me to shepherd the church. I just knew that this was part of this journey. There will be those who may disagree, but I've spent many years, and so have others, looking at the prohibitive passages of Paul: 1 Corinthians 14:34, 1 Timothy 2:15, and others. You look at them in their literary and historical context, and you see that Paul was addressing some very genuine problems in the churches at that time. Did he mean this to be a general prohibition for all times? It does not appear so when you look at the gifts and the anointing over time—of how God has used women to build the body of Christ.

I don't spend a lot of energy defending this call. I'm called to serve, and I'll ultimately face our Lord and be held accountable for using my gifts to their greatest capacity. I don't have energy to continually defend. I'm just called to shepherd a church and present to Christ a healthy body of believers who know him and are growing and sharing their faith.

I've never been more fulfilled in all my life. It doesn't mean it's easy. It just means this is what I've always been meant to do. I'm very thankful and humbled by this privilege. I have no other agenda than to serve God.

**Rev!:** What's happened in the first three years of your ministry here?

**Metcalf:** I've fallen in love with the church family. We're in a middle-low-income area. There's a vast variety of people who live around us. Our mission is to bring the gospel to this densely populated area. It's been an incredible journey.

We've seen all kinds of new people come to know Christ. Our children's ministry has exploded. There are young couples and young adults coming back to Christ.

We've seen growth in all areas. We believe this is the result of the Holy Spirit, the preaching of the Word, and a lot of prayer.

**Rev!:** Have you seen anyone leave because the church hired a female pastor?

**Metcalf:** I've not seen anyone leave the church because of me being a woman.

In fact the gentleman who wrote the letter, after hearing me preach and sitting in the back, ultimately apologized and became an avid supporter and dear friend.

**Rev!:** What do you think are the liabilities of being a woman as senior pastor, if any?

**Metcalf:** The liabilities are that culturally, we've not seen many women as shepherds. In our denomination, this was a part of our heritage from the beginning. In the early '30s, at least 20 percent of our credentialed ministers

were women. They were out there preaching, pasturing, and planting churches. One woman planted 17 churches in four states.

Where the Spirit of God is at work, there doesn't seem to be a great concern over who's doing the preaching. It's the power of God's Word and the presence of the Holy Spirit that takes that Word and penetrates hearts and works change. If this is not of God, God will not bless it. We're seeing the Lord at work.

Our culture has conditioned us to not see a woman in the pulpit, so it's awkward. Then when you find those prohibitive passages of Paul—a surface reading of that would indicate that women are not supposed to do that.

All women are not called to lead women's ministry or music or a staffed position. Some of us were actually gifted with leadership and administrative gifts and pastoral gifts. My heart is as much in tune with helping to minister to men and women, boys and girls. That's just the tent that God has widened for me to minister. I've never had a particular group that I was impassioned to reach. It's always been the body, to people, wherever there was a lost soul.

The only limitations are what I put on myself. As I approach this prayerfully, humbly, the Lord makes up for anything I lack. I honestly don't have time to go all over the place saying I have a right to do this. My rights are on the cross. They've been on the cross. It's a surrendered life. Where God leads I'll follow. What doors God opens, I'll walk through.

**Rev!:** What are the assets of being a female as a pastor?

**Metcalf:** I think at times it can catch people off guard, in that you don't come across as an overpowering, overarching leader. I can't do that with a 5-foot-2-inch frame. There's not an intimidation to begin with. I pray that they see me first as a woman of God who loves and is following the Lord. Then there's an empowerment of holy boldness to preach with power and God-given authority.

I don't try to rule over as a servant of God. I'm called to train and empower others to be all they're meant to be. I have as many men as women walk through the Word of God with me. God's gifting is not gender oriented. I look at a soul as a soul, be it man or woman. I want to make the most of this.

**Rev!:** Do you have any encouragement to women either wrestling with a call to be a senior pastor or new to it and being unsure?

**Metcalf:** Any man or woman, my word of encouragement would be—be still before the Lord, listen carefully to God, stay very close to the Word of God, stand on his promises and walk with a humbled, surrendered heart. God will move in God's way and God's time. Align your heart with him and you'll know what to do.

