

Letter to the Editor of the Presbyterian Record, sent August 26, 2007, written by Jay Brennan

Congratulations to Rev. Gael Matheson for her doggedness in fighting the Presbytery of PEI and winning at least a minimal financial award and reinstatement with the help of the human rights commission. I hope that the Presbytery of PEI will, at last, recognize that this is a paltry price to pay for her long years of seeking a remedy for the brutal bullying and public humiliation that this minister suffered in one of their congregations. The Presbytery should be encouraged to act generously and ensure that Rev. Matheson immediately receives appropriate employment, her legal fees covered, be offered a formal opportunity to be reconciled to those who led the fight against her, and other appropriate means of support. The Record article is somewhat disingenuous by indicating the numbers of women in leadership roles in the PEI Presbytery as if this would indicate an isolated incident. The issue was bullying and harassment which happens to both women and men clergy. Many would agree that such behaviour is a common experience for clergy in the PCC. Ministers have the appearance of authority but are dependent on popularity with their congregations and fellow presbyters for their livelihoods. They have little procedural recourse and minimal financial resources with which to defend their careers if they lose their popularity and do not have another congregation and/or presbytery to quickly jump to. The Matheson story makes me wonder if there is a coming day, as with the residential schools, when the Churches will be forced by the State to settle with hundreds of clergy who have suffered wrongful dismissal, harassment, bullying and public humiliation. Note from the story that individuals would personally be called to account for their actions. This should make at least a few elders and presbyters think a little more before they mindlessly throw their hand in with the lynching mob.