News



Pope Francis greets Consolata Sr. Simona Brambilla, superior general of the Consolata Missionary Sisters, during a June 5, 2017, audience with the men's and women's branches of the religious missionary congregation. (CNS/L'Osservatore Romano)

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Pope Francis has appointed a woman for the first time to be the No. 2 official of the Roman Curia office that works with religious orders and their members.

Consolata Missionary Sr. Simona Brambilla will be secretary of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, the Vatican announced Oct. 7.

According to Vatican statistics published in February, there are nearly 609,000 professed religious women in the world. There are just under 50,000 religious brothers and just over 128,000 religious-order priests.

For decades women religious and many bishops decried the lack of women in top leadership roles at the dicastery which is called to promote religious life, including approving the statutes of religious congregations, when the vast majority of them are communities of women.

In fact, it was a recurring topic at the Synod of Bishops on consecrated life in 1994.

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Archbishop Maurice Couture of Quebec, who died in 2018, had told the synod that simply looking at the Vatican Yearbook's listing of dicastery personnel one notes "the absence of women in those decision-making positions of the church that affect their lives."

Pope Francis' document on the reform of the Roman Curia said, "The dicastery is to promote, encourage and regulate the practice of the evangelical counsels, how they are lived out in the approved forms of consecrated life and all matters concerning the life and activity of Societies of Apostolic Life throughout the Latin Church."

Brambilla, a 58-year-old Italian, has been an external member of the dicastery since 2019. She served two terms as superior of the Consolata Missionary Sisters, leading the congregation from 2011 to May 2023.

After earning a nursing degree, she entered the order in 1988 and studied psychology at the Pontifical Gregorian University. In 1999, after taking her final vows, she went to Mozambique where she did youth ministry before returning to Rome in 2002, earning her doctorate in psychology from the Gregorian University in 2008.