News

The International Union of Superiors General announced Aug. 25 the retirement of Loretto Sr. Patricia Murray (left), from Ireland, as UISG executive secretary, with Sr. Roxanne Schares, an American School Sister of Notre Dame, to succeed her Sept. 1. (Courtesy of UISG)

by Chris Herlinger

View Author Profile
cherlinger@ncronline.org

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The International Union of Superiors General, or UISG, has announced the retirement of Loreto Sr. Patricia Murray as executive secretary. American Sr. Roxanne Schares, a School Sister of Notre Dame and currently UISG's associate executive secretary, will succeed Murray on Sept. 1.

In an announcement on Aug. 25, UISG praised Murray, who is Irish, for her more than 11 years of leadership, saying she guided the Rome-based body "with spiritual depth and organizational clarity in a time of major challenges and transformation for consecrated life."

The statement said that Murray "offered a significant contribution to the life of the Union, supporting the Superiors General with passion and vision in their journeys of discernment and leadership."

The announcement praised Murray's "competence, professionalism and ecclesial sensitivity," and, by fostering communion and collaboration among congregations, "encouraging a renewed spirit of synodality."

The statement also said Murray has promoted "ongoing dialogue with the wider church and international organizations, ensuring that the voice of religious women is heard in contexts where their presence and commitment are a prophetic witness."

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UISG President Sr. Oonah O'Shea, a member of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion, expressed both gratitude and hope for the ministries of both Murray and Schares during a time of leadership transition.

"We warmly thank Sr. Patricia Murray for the generous gift of her service, and we welcome Sr. Roxanne with gratitude, entrusting this new beginning to the Spirit who leads us and opens us to a future of hope," O'Shea said. "Together we continue our journey, with faith and trust, at the service of consecrated life in the world."

Loreto Sr. Patricia Murray with two staff members of the Solidarity Teacher Training College in Yambio, South Sudan, during a 2013 visit to Solidarity with South Sudan projects. (Courtesy of Friends in Solidarity)

Murray, UISG and congregational leadership have led religious life during a number of global challenges in the last decade, including the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, global economic downturns, migration crises, continued human trafficking and climate devastation, as well as changes in congregational life and the affirmation of the church's synodal process.

These challenges and developments prompted or expanded UISG initiatives.

In a statement accompanying the announcement of her retirement, Murray said the last decade "has been a period of change and transformation, and there is much to celebrate despite the many challenges and the contexts in which we, as religious women, have had to face our own vulnerability and fragility. This very experience has placed us deeply among the women and men of our time."

Murray praised Pope Francis for addressing UISG assemblies, challenging sisters "to wake up the world" and "to leave behind our safe and secure places in order to go to the peripheries, both geographical and existential."

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>
> —Sr. Patricia Murray

Also important, Murray said, were UISG's expansion of formation programs for superiors general, members of general councils and congregational members.

These encounters, she said, "have created a growing sense of being a global sisterhood, reaching out together to respond to contemporary needs and supporting one another when times or contexts are difficult. Many topics have been addressed, with special focus on leadership formation, interculturality, spirituality and synodality."

In a statement, Schares, who is a native of Iowa, said she accepted the call to be the next UISG executive secretary with "humility and readiness to serve" and praised Murray's commitment, which she said helped UISG grow "as a global sisterhood, expanded networking and collaboration, and strengthened the witness of the charismatic identity of consecrated life."

Related: Q&A with Sr. Roxanne Schares, new associate executive secretary of UISG

Noting the parallel events of UISG's 60th anniversary and the wider church's Jubilee Year of Hope, Schares said this year marks "a significant moment for us women religious. In a world marked by great discord, violence, and war, we recognize the tremendous need for us to be bearers of hope that transforms, prophetic witnesses of the Gospel, and experts in communion."

She noted UISG's calls and priorities for 2025 through 2031, under the rubric "Walking into the Future Together." That, she said, guides sisters in embracing both continuity and change, "to support religious life, enrich the church, be a prophetic voice, align for mission and undertake all that it does in a discerning, synodal and

spiritually grounded way."

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Schares served as general superior of her congregation from 2018 to 2024 and as a UISG executive board member. She has served as a member of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, a post she has held since 2021.

From 2007 to 2015, she served as her congregation's coordinator for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, or JPIC. A teacher by vocation, Schares studied theology at St. Louis University and taught high school in Iowa, Minnesota and North Dakota for nine years before ministering in East Africa for nearly three decades, including work in refugee camps and urban settings with the Jesuit Refugee Service.

In an interview earlier this year with Global Sisters Report, Schares said: "I've learned to try to be open and discern the calls that come, and this has expanded my heart to embrace an ever-widening world reality."