



Sr. Mary Teresa Barron, a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles, speaks during a news conference on the Synod of Bishops on synodality at the Vatican Oct. 7, 2024. (CNS/Justin McLellan)



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Pope Leo XIV named Irish Sr. Mary Teresa Barron to lead the Vatican's global network of missionary societies, making her the first woman to hold the post and continuing the pope's pattern of appointing women to senior positions in the Roman Curia.

Barron, 57, was appointed president of the Pontifical Mission Societies and adjunct secretary of the Dicastery for Evangelization's section responsible for missionary territories, the Vatican announced Thursday (Oct. 8). She will take up the role Jan. 4, 2027.

The Donegal native is well-known among the world's more than 600,000 religious sisters. She was previously the head of the International Union of Superiors General, or UISG, which represents the heads of women's religious congregations worldwide, and since 2018 has been the superior general of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles, a religious congregation founded to establish missions in Africa.

Before being posted in Rome she had served as a missionary in Nigeria and Tanzania working in women's empowerment, pastoral work and HIV/AIDS-related projects.

Barron drew attention during the 2024 Vatican synod assembly when she [said](#) that, regarding the possibilities for women's leadership in the church, "we're actually quite ignorant of what is possible at the moment" and that one of the synod's objectives was to "share the possibilities that are open to women for governance, leadership roles within the church."

Asked about women's ordination during the 2024 synod, which was also attended by the future Pope Leo, Barron said that while "some women do sense a call to priesthood or diaconate," the church must "look broader than 'can we or can we not'

[ordain women] from a theological or a canonical point of view, but in terms of the Spirit calling to ministry today, and in terms of the needs of mission today."

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Barron said in a [statement](#) that her appointment is "a recognition of the countless women, Religious and lay, who have dedicated their lives to proclaiming the Gospel and serving God's people in every corner of the world."

Her appointment is the third major nomination of a woman to lead a major Vatican office by the pope. He previously [named former EWTN News president](#) Maria Montserrat "Montse" Alvarado to lead the Vatican's communications department and Salesian Sr. Alessandra Smerilli to [head its social justice office](#).

The move fills a vacancy left open since March 2025 when the former head of the mission societies was moved by Pope Francis to work in the office which governs Vatican City. In classic Leo style, he took his time in finding a replacement, but major [personnel moves](#) are becoming increasingly common from the pope as he enters his 18th month in the role.

Barron's role falls within a section of the Vatican's evangelization office dedicated to spreading the Gospel in new territories which is led by Filipino [Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle](#), formerly considered a frontrunner to become pope.

The Pontifical Mission Societies comprises four offices which focus on dedicating resources to the church in mission territories, the evangelization of children, training of local priests and formation of Catholics in missionary work.

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