Vatican



Women look at "Women Church World," a monthly women's magazine insert in the Vatican's L'Osservatore Romano newspaper, in this file photo. (CNS photo/L'Osservatore Romano via Reuters)



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The director and all-female staff of a monthly women's magazine published by the Vatican's newspaper have resigned in protest, claiming the newspaper's new chief editor sought to water-down the publication by placing it "under the direct control of men."

The editors of "Women Church World," which has operated as an independent part of L'Osservatore Romano since the magazine's initial creation as a supplement to the newspaper in 2012, were set to announce their resignations in a planned April 1 editorial that now appears unlikely to be published.

The editors also wrote an open letter to Pope Francis explaining their decision, in which they say they are "throwing in the towel because we feel surrounded by a climate of mistrust and continual delegitimization."

Both the editorial and the letter to the pope were provided to NCR. The Associated Press first reported the resignations.

In the editorial, director Lucetta Scaraffia says her magazine "has not found the support" of the newspaper's new editor, Andrea Monda, who was appointed by Francis at the end of 2018 to take charge of the Vatican's daily paper.

Scaraffia, a noted journalist and history professor, also claims that Monda wanted to select "collaborators who guarantee obedience, and who renounce every possibility of opening up a true, free and courageous dialogue."

"It is a return to clerical self-referentiality and renounces the *parrhesia* so often called for by Pope Francis," she states, using a Greek term for speaking without fear. "Consequently, we can only declare our work concluded, interrupted abruptly even though there are still ongoing projects."

Monda, a literature and religion professor, replaced Giovanni Maria Vian as editor of L'Osservatore Romano in December.

In a statement following the initial report of the resignations, Monda refuted Scaraffia's claims. He says he refrained "from interfering in any way in the crafting of the monthly supplement, limiting myself to offering my due contribution in the suggestion of themes and people to possibly involve."

"In no way have I selected anyone, man or woman, with the criterion of obedience," he states.

Besides Scaraffia, "Women Church World" has two staff writers and an editorial board of eight members. While the editorial and the letter to Francis referred to a group of resignations, Scaraffia did not immediately respond to a question about how many people had resigned.

Scaraffia told the Associated Press that the initial conflict with Monda began when he told her that he planned to take over as the overall editor of "Women Church World."

The magazine has been noted for the wide range of issues it covers, and its willingness to address topics that are normally taboo at the Vatican. Its February issue, for example, denounced the sexual abuse of Catholic sisters by priests, referring even to sisters who were forced to have abortions after becoming pregnant.

The coverage of the issue led to Francis admitting for the first time that the Vatican must do more to prevent the abuse of sisters by priests.

The editors' resignations are the latest in a continuing series of spats over the Vatican's various communications operations, which Francis has sought to streamline and consolidate into one new overarching office, the Dicastery for Communications.

The first director of that office, Msgr. Dario Vigano, resigned in March 2018 after mishandling a letter from retired Pope Benedict XVI. Francis appointed Italian journalist Paolo Ruffini as his replacement in July 2018.

The director and vice-director of the Vatican's press office, American Greg Burke and Spaniard Paloma García Ovejero, then resigned together Dec. 31, following apparent tensions with Ruffini over the shape of the city-state's communications structure.

The press office is currently being led on an interim basis by Italian journalist Alessandro Gisotti.

In their letter to Francis, the editors of "Women Church World" told the pontiff that they saw their work at the Vatican "returning to the antiquated and dry custom of

choosing from above, under the direct control of men, women considered trustworthy."

"In this way a positive work is being discarded and the beginning of a frank and sincere work, an occasion of *parrhesia*, is being turned back into clerical self-referentiality," they continued. "Just when this path is being denounced by you as being infertile."

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