Vatican



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Pope Francis appointed an Italian woman as an undersecretary in the Vatican's Secretariat of State Jan. 15, in the first such appointment of a woman to a managerial role in what is traditionally considered the city-state's most important office.

Francesca Di Giovanni, who has worked for the Secretariat for 27 years, will be one of two undersecretaries in the Section for Relations with States, which is essentially the Vatican's foreign ministry.

The section is led by British Archbishop Paul Gallagher. Di Giovanni joins Polish Msgr. Miroslaw Wachowski, who had been appointed an undersecretary to Gallagher in October.

In making the new appointment, Francis appears to be elevating what normally would be called a *capo ufficio*, or department head, to a full undersecretary position.

In an interview with the state-run Vatican News shortly after announcement of the appointment, Di Giovanni explained that she will be responsible for the Vatican's multilateral relationships, such as with international institutions, while Wachowski will focus on its bilateral ones, such as with individual countries.

Both roles had previously been filled by one undersecretary, now-Archbishop Antoine Camilleri, who Francis appointed the Vatican's ambassador to Ethiopia and Djibouti last September.

In the Vatican News interview, Di Giovanni, 66, praised the pope for appointing the first woman to such a role.

"The Holy Father has made an unprecedented decision, certainly, which, beyond myself personally, represents an indication of an attention towards women," she said. "But the responsibility is connected to the job, rather than to the fact of being a woman."

There are now about half a dozen women serving in undersecretary or equivalent roles in the Vatican's sprawling bureaucracy.

Among the others are Our Lady of Consolation Sr. Carmen Ros Nortes at the religious congregation; Drs. Linda Ghisoni and Gabriella Gambino at the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life; and Cristiane Murray at the press office.

One woman leads a Vatican office: Barbara Jatta, appointed as director of the Vatican Museums by Francis in 2016.

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Two noted women theologians praised Di Giovanni's appointment in brief comments to NCR.

Charity of Leavenworth Sr. Susan Wood called the selection a "tribute to her talents and capability to make a significant contribution to the Vatican's Secretariat of State"

"Beyond that, her appointment contributes to Pope Francis' efforts to diversify the curia and to utilize the talents of women in service of the church in significant roles," said Wood, the academic dean at Regis College, the Jesuit school of theology in Canada.

Immaculate Heart of Mary Sr. Mary Ann Hinsdale called Di Giovanni's appointment "a small, but significant gesture" by Francis.

"My hope is that his action might signal future appointments of talented, capable women to other Vatican dicasteries and departments," said Hinsdale, an associate professor of theology at Boston College. "It's about time!"

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