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Vatican

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Law professor Charlotte Kreuter-Kirchhof, recently appointed by Pope Francis as a member of the high-level group that oversees the Vatican's finances, said Aug. 10 that she regards it possible that women could serve as priests in the Catholic Church and in top roles within the Vatican bureaucracy.

"In my view very much is possible in this area," she told catholic website katholisch.de in an interview. "But there are heated debates going on in the church about this at the moment."

A Duesseldorf-based professor, Kreuter-Kirchhof is one of six women that Francis named as members of the Vatican's Council for the Economy on Aug. 6. Francis created the group in 2014 to supervise the financial activities of both the Vatican city-state and the offices of the Holy See.

The council had previously included solely men.

Kreuter-Kirchhof, who is also chairwoman of the Hildegardis Association, which supports women in academic education and job training, said in the interview she saw encouraging signs of women's leadership in the German church.

"In many dioceses women are taking on central leadership tasks and making a substantial contribution to the future viability of our church," she said.

Kreuter-Kirchhof described the new appointment to the Council for the Economy as a "clear sign of the desired cooperation between bishops, priests and laypeople and of the cooperation between men and women." The council membership reflects a

togetherness that is preparing the church for the future, she said.

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The six new female members include another German woman in addition to Kreuter-Kirchhof: the chairwoman of the National Association of German Cooperative Banks, Marija Kolak, from Berlin.

The other four women members of the council come from both Spain and the United Kingdom. The group also includes one layman, an Italian, and eight prelates. German Cardinal Reinhard Marx remains the council's leader.