Vatican
News



by Christopher White

Former Vatican Correspondent (2021-2025)

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

November 4, 2021
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Editor's Note: *This story has been updated to add comments.*

ROME — Pope Francis on Nov. 4 appointed Franciscan Sister of the Eucharist Raffaella Petrini as the new secretary general of the Governorate of Vatican City State, making her the first woman to ever hold the post and now the highest-ranking woman in the Vatican.

Petrini, 52, has served as an official at the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples since 2005. She will now be responsible for overseeing the administrative operations of the world's smallest state, which includes the Vatican museums, post office and police.

Her appointment — in a role traditionally held by a bishop — comes at a time when religious sisters are slowly being appointed to greater positions of authority in the historically all-male run Vatican departments.

In August, Francis named Salesian Sr. Alessandra Smerilli as interim secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. Prior to that, Xavierian Sr. Nathalie Becquart was named as the number 2 in the Vatican's synod office last February, and she is expected to become the first woman to vote at a synod of

bishops.

In a statement to NCR, the secretary general of the International Union of Superiors General, which represents 600,000 religious sisters from around the globe, said she "warmly congratulates" Petrini on her appointment.

"Her congregational charism and her many years of experience at the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, will be a support to her as she serves the universal Church and its mission in today's world," Loreto Sr. Patricia Murray wrote in an email.

A native of Rome, Petrini holds a degree in political science from the Guido Carli Free International University and a doctorate from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, where she has served as a professor.

Advertisement