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Pope Francis and his international Council of Cardinals continue their discussion of women's role in the church at the Vatican Feb. 5, 2024. Pictured, clockwise from the left, are: Cardinals Gérald Lacroix of Québec; Juan José Omella Omella of Barcelona; Seán O'Malley of Boston; Fridolin Ambongo Besungu of Kinshasa, Congo; and Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state. Continuing, to the right of the pope are: Bishop Marco Mellino, council secretary; and Cardinals Oswald Gracias of Mumbai, India; Sérgio da Rocha of São Salvador da Bahia, Brazil; Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, president of the commission governing Vatican City State; and Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg. Bishop Jo Bailey Wells, deputy secretary-general of the Anglican Communion, left, Salesian Sr. Linda Pocher and Giuliva Di Berardino, a consecrated virgin from the Diocese of Verona, Italy, are the women who addressed the group. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Vatican City — February 6, 2024
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With the help of a woman Anglican bishop, a Salesian sister and a consecrated virgin, Pope Francis and his international Council of Cardinals devoted the first morning of their February meeting "to deepening their reflection, begun last December, on the role of women in the church," the Vatican press office said.

Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office, said Feb. 5 the pope and cardinals heard from Bishop Jo Bailey Wells, deputy secretary-general of the Anglican Communion; Salesian Sr. Linda Pocher, a professor of Christology and Mariology at Rome's Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences "Auxilium," and Giuliva Di Berardino, a consecrated virgin and liturgist from the Diocese of Verona, Italy.

The pope and council were to continue meeting the afternoon of Feb. 5 and all day Feb. 6, focusing on other themes, Bruni said.

The Vatican has not shared details about the discussions on the role of women in the church nor the texts of presentations made at the meeting.

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Cardinal Gérald Lacroix of Québec was present at the meeting; in Jan. 30 video message said he would "temporarily withdraw from activities in my diocese" after he was accused in a civil lawsuit of inappropriately touching a 17-year-old girl on two

occasions in the 1980s. He has denied the allegations.

The Vatican press office did not comment on the cardinal's participation in the council meeting.

In addition to Lacroix, those at the February meeting included Cardinals Juan José Omella Omella of Barcelona; Seán O'Malley of Boston; Fridolin Ambongo Besungu of Kinshasa, Congo; Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state; Oswald Gracias of Mumbai, India; Sérgio da Rocha of São Salvador da Bahia, Brazil; Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, president of the commission governing Vatican City State; and Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg.