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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 C. Lacroix of Québec; Juan José Omella Omella of Barcelona; Seán P. 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 Sister 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 — April 17, 2024
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Pope Francis and his international Council of Cardinals continued their discussions about the role of women in the church, listening to women experts, including a professor who spoke about how culture impacts women's roles and status.

The pope and the nine-member Council of Cardinals invited women, including an Anglican bishop, to make presentations at their meetings in December and in February as well.

The council met April 15-16 in the Domus Sanctae Marthae, the pope's residence, the Vatican press office said.

On the first day, Sister Regina da Costa Pedro, a member of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate and director of the Pontifical Mission Societies of Brazil, shared "concrete stories and the thoughts of some Brazilian women," the press office said.

Stella Morra, a professor of theology at Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University, "examined the role cultures have in the recognition of the role of women in different parts of the world," the press office said.

A priest and two women made presentations at the council's December meeting and published their papers in Italian in a book with a foreword by Francis, "Smaschilizzare La Chiesa?" ("De-masculinize the Church?).

During the preparation for the synod on synodality and during its first assembly in October, the pope wrote in the foreword, "We realized that we have not listened enough to the voice of women in the church and that the church still has a lot to learn."

"It is necessary to listen to each other to 'de-masculinize' the church because the church is a communion of men and women who share the same faith and the same baptismal dignity," he wrote.

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At the February meeting, the pope and cardinals heard from: Bishop Jo Bailey Wells, deputy secretary-general of the Anglican Communion; Salesian Sister 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.

Bailey Wells said she was invited to "describe the Anglican journey in regard to the ordination of women, both in the Church of England and across the (Anglican) Communion."

At the April meeting, the Vatican said, the second day began with a report about the ongoing Synod of Bishops on synodality by Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops, and Msgr. Piero Coda, secretary general of the International Theological Commission.

The meeting concluded "with reports from each cardinal on the social, political and ecclesial situation in his home region," the press office said.

"Throughout the session there were references — and on several occasions prayer — dedicated to the scenarios of war and conflict being experienced in so many places around the world, particularly in the Middle East and in Ukraine," the statement said.

"The cardinals — and with them the pope — expressed concern about what is taking place and their hope for an increase in efforts to identify paths of negotiation and peace," it said.

The council will meet again in June.

The members of the council are: Cardinals Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state; Seán P. O'Malley of Boston; Sérgio da Rocha of São Salvador da Bahia, Brazil; Oswald Gracias of Mumbai, India; Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, president of the commission governing Vatican City State; Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg; Gérald C. Lacroix of Québec; Juan José Omella Omella of Barcelona; and Fridolin Ambongo Besungu of Kinshasa, Congo. Bishop Marco Mellino serves as the council's secretary.