Vatican
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Pope, seated and pictured from behind, surrounded by Cardinals at large U-shaped table, cov

Pope Francis leads the 18th meeting of his Council of Cardinals at the Vatican Feb. 13, 2017. (CNS/L'Osservatore Romano, handout)

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Vatican City — June 19, 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 and discussing the possibilities according to canon law.

This is the fourth time the pope and his nine-member Council of Cardinals have invited women to make presentations at their meetings. Women experts, including an Anglican bishop, attended the December, February and April meetings.

The council met June 17-18 in the Domus Sanctae Marthae, the pope's residence, the Vatican press office said.

Salesian Sister Linda Pocher, a professor of Christology and Mariology at Rome's Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences "Auxilium," introduced the speakers on the

first day, which was dedicated to the women's talks and the group's reflections.

Valentina Rotondi, a professor and researcher specializing in social sciences, spoke about seeing "the economy as care and good management in the context of a profound intergenerational relationship," the press office said.

Donata Horak, a professor of canon law in Italy, reflected on canon law by making several contrasts, "such as justice and mercy, consultative power and deliberative power, hierarchical principle and ecclesiology of communion, democratization and the monarchical model," the press office said.

Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Mumbai, India, a member of the council, told Vatican News June 18, that he agreed with the importance of increasing the role of women in the church.

"I come from India and in some areas women have little importance, they are 'second class,' and for this reason the church is working" to give them "the right position in the family, in society, in politics," he said.

In the church's Code of Canon Law, "there are many possibilities" for women's leadership in the church, he said. Experience has shown him "many times" that women were able to address issues with "a point of view that men had not considered. And I have great hope that this will be developed."

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Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu of Kinshasa, Congo, told Vatican News that, "here in the churches, more than half of the people who participate in the celebrations are women," but when we see the responsibilities they hold, "they are few."

The cardinal said it has become clear that these responsibilities have to grow, but not in a "militant" sense. The reason their responsibilities should increase, he said, is, like the pope says, because "the church is a woman" and there is a "motherhood" that must be valued in the Catholic community.

The Vatican press office said the second day of the meeting began with a report about safeguarding and the work of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of

Minors by Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley of Boston, who is the commission's president and a council member. Gracias then focused on the work of the bishops' conferences.

The meeting concluded with discussions about the situation in each cardinal's home region with special attention to current conflicts, the press office said.

The council will meet again in December 2024.

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; Gracias; 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.