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Early morning light hits St. Peter's Basilica as workers prepare to hoist a Christmas tree in the center of St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Nov. 23, 2023. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)

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Pope Francis has named three U.S. experts — two women and an abbot — to be members of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, a position once reserved for cardinals and bishops.

The three whose appointments were announced by the Vatican Jan. 11 were: Mary Healy, a biblical scholar and professor of Scripture at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit; Donna Orsuto, a theologian and co-founder and former director of the Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas in Rome; and Benedictine Abbot Jeremy Driscoll of Mount Angel Abbey in Oregon.

All three had been serving as consultors of the dicastery and became the first non-bishops to join the more than 40 cardinal-and bishop-members.

Their appointments come less than a week after the pope appointed the first female prefect of a dicastery, a possibility opened by "Praedicate Evangelium," the pope's 2022 constitution reforming the Roman Curia.

Orsuto, who is from Ashtabula, Ohio, has lived in Rome for nearly five decades. She is director of the Department of Moral Theology and Spiritual Theology at Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University where she has been teaching since 1990. She served as director of the Lay Centre from 1986 to 2024 and now serves as senior adviser and a member of its board of directors.

Healy, who grew up on Long Island, New York, is one of the first three women ever appointed to the Pontifical Biblical Commission, which she joined in 2014. She has also served as a member of the Catholic-Pentecostal International Dialogue, which is coordinated by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity.

Abbot Driscoll, an expert on the church fathers and the new evangelization, was elected the 12th abbot of Mount Angel Abbey in 2016. He taught theology at Mount Angel Seminary and the Pontifical Atheneum of Sant'Anselmo in Rome. He also serves on various Vatican commissions and leads retreats in the United States and elsewhere.

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The appointments came as Francis also appointed several new cardinals, who were welcomed into the College of Cardinals Dec. 7, to be members of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia.

Some of the appointments include the following:

— At the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith: Cardinals Pablo Virgilio Siongco David of Kalookan, Philippines; Jaime Spengler of Porto Alegre, Brazil; Ignace Bessi Dogbo of Abidjan, Ivory Coast; and Roberto Repole of Turin, Italy.

— Dicastery for Bishops: Cardinal Rolandas Makrickas, coadjutor archpriest of Rome's Basilica of St. Mary Major.

— Dicastery for Clergy: Cardinal Baldassare Reina, vicar for the Diocese of Rome.

— Dicastery for the Causes of Saints: Cardinal Dominique Joseph Mathieu of Tehran and Isfahan, Iran.

— Dicastery for Culture and Education: Cardinal Mykola Bychok of the Ukrainian Eparchy of Sts. Peter and Paul of Melbourne, Australia.

— Dicastery for Legislative Texts: Cardinal Frank Leo of Toronto.

— Dicastery for Communication: Cardinal Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi of Tokyo.