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Sr. Tiziana Merletti, the newly-appointed secretary of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. (File/Courtesy of Vatican News)

by Catholic News Service

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In his first appointment of a top-level official of the Roman Curia, Pope Leo XIV named Sr. Tiziana Merletti, a canon lawyer, to be secretary of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

Merletti, a member of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor, succeeds Consolata Missionary Sr. Simona Brambilla, whom Pope Francis appointed prefect of the dicastery in January. Brambilla is the first woman to head a Vatican dicastery.

The women's International Union of Superiors General (UISG, in Italian) thanked Leo and congratulated Merletti on her appointment, which the Vatican announced May 22.

As a member of the union's canon law council and a member of the Commission for Safeguarding operated jointly by the men's and women's unions of superiors, "her contributions are a gift to our global network, promoting justice, care and integrity in consecrated life," the superiors' group said. "We congratulate Sr. Tiziana on this important mission and assure her of our prayers as she takes on this new responsibility in service to consecrated life around the world."

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The dicastery, according to the apostolic constitution on the Roman Curia, is called "to promote, encourage and regulate the practice of the evangelical counsels, how they are lived out in the approved forms of consecrated life and all matters concerning the life and activity of Societies of Apostolic Life throughout the Latin Church."

According to Vatican statistics, there are close to 600,000 professed women religious in the Catholic Church. The number of religious-order priests is about 128,500 and the number of religious brothers is close to 50,000.

Merletti, 65, was born in Pineto, Italy, and earned a civil law degree before making her first vows as a member of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in 1986. In 1992 she earned her doctorate in canon law from the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome.

From 2004 to 2013, she was superior general of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor. At the time of her appointment, she was teaching canon law at the Pontifical Antonianum University in Rome and serving as a canon law expert with the UISG.

This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV** feature series. View the full series.