News



Loreto Sr. Patricia Murray, a member of the synod and executive secretary of the International Union of Superiors General, speaks during a briefing about the assembly of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican Oct. 16. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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A prominent Irish nun said Oct. 16 that women's voices are being heard at Pope Francis' big meeting on the future of the Catholic Church, and said delegates are also acknowledging the hurt caused by the church's position on homosexuality.

Sr. Patricia Murray, executive secretary of the main umbrella group of women's religious orders, provided an update on the status of discussions halfway through the Vatican's nearly month-long synod, or meeting.

Francis called the gathering to press his vision for a church that is more inclusive and welcoming, where ordinary Catholics have a greater say in decision making than the all-male priestly hierarchy. A central theme has been the role of women in church governance, but other hot button issues are also on the agenda, including acceptance for LGBTQ+ Catholics and priestly celibacy.

Murray is one of the 54 women granted the right to vote for the first time at a synod. She was also elected to the commission that will draft the synthesis document at the end of the meeting, another first for a woman. That document will provide the basis for reflection when a second session is convened next year.

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Murray, who heads the International Union of Superiors General, told a Vatican briefing that her election to the drafting commission was symbolically important and evidence that women's voices are being heard and considered at the meeting.

"Appointments such as these are symbolic. They're a statement, and an indication of the desire to have women's participation in decision making," she said. Even though women are still in the minority among the 365 voting members, "as women, we're well able to make our point and to use our time and space well."

Murray was also asked about the closed-door discussions on the church's position on homosexuality, after the working document called for gays and others who have felt excluded from the church to be welcomed. Specifically, she was asked if the synod would in some way atone for the hurt caused to generations of LGBTQ+ Catholics.

Catholic teaching holds that gays must be treated with dignity and respect but that homosexual acts are "intrinsically disordered."

"I think at many of the tables, if not all, the question of hurt and the woundedness of people both individually and collectively has been dealt with and listened to," Murray said. "Equally there have been discussions around how to symbolically, in a sense, represent that hurt. Some people have said 'Sorry is not enough.' "

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> — Sr. Patricia Murray
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She said it was too soon to know how a gesture of forgiveness, or the synthesis document itself, might address the question. But she made clear: "There is a deep awareness of the pain and suffering that has been caused."

Separately, the Vatican confirmed that the two mainland Chinese bishops who were allowed to attend the synod are going home early. The synod spokesman, Paolo Ruffini, cited "pastoral requirements," as the reason for their early departure.

The presence of the two bishops had been welcomed by the Vatican as evidence of the church's universality, following tensions over China's appointment of a bishop that appeared to violate a 2018 accord with the Holy See.

This story appears in the **Synod on Synodality** feature series. View the full series.