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Pope Francis greets Sister Chantal Desmarais, a member of the Sisters of Charity of St. Mary and a synod delegate from Canada, in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Oct. 4. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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Editor's note: Global Sisters Report's Monday Starter is a feature from GSR staff writers that rounds up news from or about women religious that you may otherwise have missed.

Monday Starter



Sisters representing the International Union of Superiors General, or UISG, during the just-completed [synod on synodality](#) have praised the event as a turning point for the Catholic Church, saying that the potential of a more decentralized, listening and participatory institution has its model in the ministry of Catholic sisters.

"The seed has been sowed," Sr. Nirmala Nazareth, one of four delegates representing UISG at the October assembly of the synod said during a Nov. 27 webinar, which attracted some 300 participants. She added that there is "no return" to an older model of church.

"I have absolutely no doubt that God's spirit was present among the synod's participants," said Nazareth, the superior general of the Sisters of the Apostolic Carmel.

"It's a profound moment we're in," said Sr. Maria Cimperman, a member of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and who heads UISG's synodal commitment initiative and moderated the webinar. "There is so much to be grateful for."

Along with Nazareth, the four delegates included Loreto Sr. Patricia Murray, UISG's executive secretary; Sr. Mary Barron, UISG's president and a member of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles; and Sr. Elysée Izerimana, a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

The four delegates did not dwell on the fact that the synod did not act on some radical changes — such as the restoration of the female diaconate — that some women's advocates sought, though they acknowledged the continuing challenges posed by patriarchal and hierarchical structures.

Instead, they chose the two-hour Zoom event as a way to accentuate the positive and stress that the synodal process will lead to positive change within the church.

The institutions of "religious life had a prophetic voice in the synod," Izerimana said when asked if those in religious life were given "fair time" at the assembly. "The synod gave us the opportunity to live this."

She added that she felt sisters at the synod had the freedom to express what they thought, as well as "what was in our hearts."

Barron said sisters were listened to at the synod because "religious life is by its nature synodal," however imperfect it may be in practice.

Those in religious life have "a wealth of wisdom" to offer the church, she said, as it tries to model a style that is more collaborative and welcoming and less hierarchical.

All said that the Oct. 2-26 synodal assembly — the culmination of a three-year process — was a deeply spiritual event, and proved a deepening experience given that the participants were gathered for a second time. (The first assembly was held in October 2023.)

Murray said that delegates felt "more at ease" having already established friendships and relationships at the first assembly. As a result, there was "a deep sense of the importance of listening deeply to each voice."

She cited the meditation that Dominican Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, recently named a cardinal by Pope Francis, made during the assembly which stressed the need for "profound listening" as being "patient, imaginative, intelligent and open-hearted."

"He reminded us to become seekers and that like Mary Magdalen we would receive more than we search for if we were open to encounter the Lord," Murray said. "He called us to breathe deeply the rejuvenating Holy Spirit that would lead us to something new and frightening.

"That was the sense that I had in the synod hall," she added, "a sense of calm that the Spirit was working in and through us."

UISG will hold another webinar focused on the synod Dec. 11.

Advertisement

Sister honored for her work in rural Malaysia

A sister whose ministry focuses on preschool education for underprivileged children in the rural Sabah region of Malaysia has won a prestigious honor from the country's National Press Club.

October's Macrokiosk *Muhibbah* Award was awarded to Sr. Dorothy Amalia Laudi of the Order of Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception.

In a Nov.11 [report](#) in the Sun newspaper, Laudi was described as a "petite nun with a big heart" who was unanimously selected for the honor because of "her untiring dedication to rural pre-school education," the article said.

It noted that Laudi was instrumental in establishing a number of mission kindergartens in what was described as one of the remotest parts of Sabah. Over 19 years, she has been instrumental in establishing 12 kindergartens — eight in Paitan and one each in Kota Marudu, Tambunan, Keningau and Pensiangan. In all, the kindergartens have 156 children, ages 4 to 6, enrolled.

"I'm deeply touched by this recognition and I thank God for His blessings," Laudi said in remarks. "I will continue my mission to help educate the poorest of Sabahans in the deep interiors of the state."

She said that many of the children come from very poor families. "Their parents can't even afford to send them to school. As a result, many are trapped, and they are married off at a young age to reduce the financial burden on their families."

But, Laudi said, "if they can get good early education, they will have no problem going through primary and secondary school. Hopefully, we can give them a shot at life and break the cycle of poverty."