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MEDIA RELEASE

Australian Religious gather with Vatican high-ranking woman on World Day of Consecrated Life

On 2 February 2023, World Day of Consecrated Life, 90 Australian Religious gathered at Mary Mackillop Place North Sydney for an event sponsored by Catholic Religious Australia: “Women, Leadership and the Synodal Process: Where to Now?”

The keynote speaker, French Xaviere Missionary Sister Nathalie Becquart, is the most senior woman within the Vatican, the first woman to be appointed as Undersecretary for the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops and therefore, in another first, to have the right to vote at the Synod.

The CRA event was part of Becquart’s recent whirlwind visit to Australia, just prior to her flying out to join with the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania (FCBCO) at its Continental Assembly in Suva, Fiji in preparation for the upcoming Synod on Synodality.

Before a full-house, Sr Becquart spoke about the tensions of seeking change in the Church, while also taking hope from all that has been achieved. She pointed out that 20 years ago, it was mainly women who advocated for women; whereas now both men and women, including clergy and bishops, are speaking up for these issues. Further, we see more women appointed to significant roles within dicasteries and the opening up of the ministries of Lector, Acolyte and Catechist to women.

Still, much more is to be done, especially for vulnerable women in impoverished, conflict-ridden areas of the world. Sr Becquart urged her listeners to continue to commit to synodality, which, to quote Pope Francis, is “the way of being the Church today”, and to seek reciprocity between men and women.

Mary-Clare Holland OP, CRA Vice-President, commented: “A key ‘takeaway’ from our time with Nathalie, beyond what she *said*, is what she *embodies*. Countless words have been uttered advocating for ecclesial inclusivity of women. What we ‘see’ in Nathalie, and in the lively responses to her and her role, is a living example of that change taking place in the heart of the Vatican.”

Anne Walker, CRA National Executive Director, agreed. “This is how real change occurs: one decision, one person, one commitment at a time. It was good to mark World Day of Consecrated Life in the presence of this unassuming religious woman who is also a powerfully-situated ecclesiastical leader, and be moved to ask: what am I doing, in concert with others, to create faithful yet innovative change in the Church through my sphere of influence?”

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