

Vatican spokesman: Female cardinals 'theoretically possible'

Joshua J. McElwee | Nov. 4, 2013 NCR Today

The Vatican's chief spokesman said women could become cardinals in the Roman Catholic church, calling such a move "theologically and theoretically" possible, according to an Irish newspaper.

Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, the director of the Holy See Press Office, [made the comments to *The Irish Times*](#) [1], a daily published in Dublin.

While the *Times* reports that the Vatican spokesperson called "nonsense" the idea that Pope Francis would name a cardinal soon, it also reports the priest was rather open about the possibility in the future.

"Theologically and theoretically, it is possible," Lombardi said about a female cardinal, according to the *Times*.

"Being a cardinal is one of those roles in the church for which, theoretically, you do not have to be ordained but to move from there to suggesting the pope will name women cardinals for the next consistory is not remotely realistic."

A consistory is the formal name for the ceremony at which the pope makes Catholics cardinals. The Vatican [announced last week](#) [2] that Pope Francis would be holding his first consistory next February.

Cardinals, sometimes known as the "princes of the church" and for their wearing of red vestments, are the only people who vote to elect the pope. Following a pope's death or resignation of the papal office, they meet in a secret conclave to cast ballots until a new pope -- usually from among their ranks -- is chosen.

Cardinals are usually senior Catholic prelates who serve either as archbishops in the world's largest dioceses or in the Vatican's central bureaucracy.

Although a woman has not been appointed a cardinal since the system of electing the pope began around the 12th century, some have suggested it would be possible for the church to name women as cardinals. They say this could happen without changing the church's teaching regarding the ordination of only men to the priesthood, as cardinals are not ordained into their ministry.

While canon law currently specifies that a cardinal must either be a priest or a bishop, some have also wondered whether the appointment of female cardinals might be a reform Pope Francis is considering.

Speculation of a woman being named a cardinal by Pope Francis has grown in recent weeks, with several papers in the United Kingdom and Ireland suggesting one candidate could be Linda Hogan, a professor of ecumenics at Trinity College Dublin.

To that possibility, Lombardi told the *Times*, "This is just nonsense ... It is simply not a realistic possibility that Pope Francis will name women cardinals for the February consistory."

[Joshua J. McElwee is *NCR* national correspondent. His email address is jmcelwee@ncronline.org. Follow him

on Twitter: [@joshjmac](#) [3].]

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