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Xavière Missionary Sr. Nathalie Becquart, undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, is pictured in the chapel at her office at the Vatican Jan. 5, 2022. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)



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Xaviãre Missionary Sr. Nathalie Becquart, the undersecretary of the Vatican's Synod of Bishops office, addressed an April 3 online gathering organized by New Ways Ministry, the Maryland-based advocacy group for LGBTQ Catholics whose founders were once censured by the Vatican.



Xaviãre Missionary Sr. Nathalie Becquart, undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, is pictured in the chapel at her office at the Vatican Jan. 5, 2022. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

In delivering a lecture entitled "Synodality: A Path of Reconciliation," Becquart said the Catholic Church is trying to re-learn the kind of synodality that marked its life in the early centuries of Christianity as a more inclusive and relational church of dialogue and listening.

"I have faith that we will receive grace to continue the path, though it's not easy," said Becquart, the first woman to serve as an undersecretary for the Synod of

Bishops. She added that the synodal conversion called for in the 2021-2023 Synod of Bishops on Synodality is "unknown" and marks a "new way" for modern Catholics.

"This synod is about the deeper identity of the church as communion and mission," she told the estimated 1,000 people from 37 countries who had registered for her virtual synodal lecture.

Pope Francis and other church leaders have framed synodality as a decisive step in the church's renewal that the Second Vatican Council proposed more than a half century ago. In [an October 2015 Vatican address](#), Francis said synodality is the path that "God expects of the Church of the third millennium."

"It's an important ecclesial event that we're all a part of," said Becquart, who emphasized that the pope has convoked the entire church in an extensive two-year process that will culminate in an October 2023 gathering of bishops and synod delegates in Rome.

As the pope has described it, and as the preparatory documents have emphasized, a synodal church that "journeys together" also seeks out the voices of marginalized groups, including the LGBTQ community. New Ways Ministry has been convening virtual synodal listening sessions for LGBTQ Catholics who may not have opportunities to share their insights in their own parishes and dioceses.

Francis DeBernardo, the group's executive director, told NCR that his team was "excited" when Becquart accepted the organization's invitation to participate in the webinar that is part of its "Father Robert Nugent Memorial Lecture Series," named after one of the group's co-founders, who died in 2014.

"We think it's a sign that not only is the Vatican serious about reaching out to all kinds of people for the synod, but also a sign that they really are ready to listen to LGBTQ people and their experiences," DeBernardo said.

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Since becoming pope in 2013, Francis has shown a sensitivity to the LGBTQ community with an openness that emphasizes respect while not moving to change church teachings on sexual morality. Last year, he wrote two letters to New Ways Ministry in which [he commended the organization](#) for its outreach to the LGBTQ

community. He referred to one of its co-founders, Loretto Sr. Jeannine Gramick, as "a valiant woman" who had suffered much for her ministry.

In May 1999, the Vatican's Congregation of the Doctrine for the Faith [declared](#) that Gramick and Nugent were to be prohibited from pastoral work with homosexual people because of the "ambiguities and errors" of their approach. The notification was signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the congregation's then-prefect who later became Pope Benedict XVI.

DeBernardo suggested that it was "no accident" that the first Vatican official to address a New Ways Ministry-sponsored event was a woman.

"Women, in particular women religious, are much more open to LGBTQ issues than men," DeBernardo said. "I think it also is a sign that leadership among women in the church can really affect the way the church progresses and the way the church leads."

In the April 3 virtual meeting, which was held over Zoom, Gramick delivered the opening prayer in which she asked for the grace for those listening "to listen, to dialogue and to discern" in "the journey of the people of God walking together in the synod."

Guiding the participants through a PowerPoint presentation, Becquart spoke of the synod's call to reconciliation and communal discernment. She underscored how the previous synods in Francis' pontificate that he convened on family life, youth and the Amazon revealed the necessity of being a church that responds to the "signs of the times" by being a listening and learning church.

Becquart said the Holy Spirit is "working everywhere in the grassroots," noting that listening sessions are being held in prisons throughout the world and over cups of coffee in people's homes. Asked about LGBTQ Catholics and those who remain skeptical because of the history of exclusion, Becquart spoke of having hope that the Holy Spirit will open up new future pathways for reconciliation.

A version of this story appeared in the **April 29-May 12, 2022** print issue under the headline: Vatican official speaks to event hosted by LGBT outreach group New Ways Ministry.