

## **ST. JOHN VIANNEY PARISH**

### **BACKGROUND ON THE PAPAL TRANSITION**

As faithful Catholics, we want to keep Pope Benedict XVI in our prayers as he retires from his ministry as the successor of St. Peter and goes to a life of seclusion, rest and prayer. We wish him every grace and blessing.

I thought you might have some questions on how the papal transition works. The following information is a digest of the background paper prepared by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. The entire paper is on their web site, along with much more information. [www.usccb.org/comm](http://www.usccb.org/comm) You can also go to our parish web site for links to the Vatican and other Catholic web sites.

### ***Papal Transitions Q & A***

#### **Does the Church have a formal name for the transition period from one pope to another?**

Yes, in fact, this period is referred to by two names. *Sede vacante*, in the Church's official Latin, is translated "vacant see," meaning that the see (or diocese) of Rome is without a bishop. The other term is "interregnum" referring to the Pope's role as a temporal monarch.

#### **When were the most recent papal transitions?**

On April 2, 2005, Pope John Paul II died at the age of 84 after 26 years as pope. On April 19, 2005, German Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected to succeed John Paul II. He took the name Pope Benedict XVI.

There were two in 1978. On August 6, 1978, Pope Paul VI died at the age of 80 after 15 years as pope. His successor, Pope John Paul I, was elected 20 days later to serve only 34 days.

#### **Have other popes resigned?**

Yes. On February 11, 2013, Pope Benedict XVI became the first pope to resign since Gregory XII in 1415 (and the first to do so willingly since St. Celestine V in 1294). His resignation is effective on February 28, 2013 at 8 PM Rome time, beginning the period of *sede vacante*.

#### **How are the events of the transition determined?**

In 1996, Pope John Paul II issued new, very detailed rules for electing his successor in a document titled *Universi Dominici Gregis* [(Shepherd) Of the Lord's Whole Flock]. While both John Paul II and Pope Paul VI eliminated or simplified many of the regal trappings associated with the *sede vacante*, centuries-old customs are still evident.

#### **How is the Church governed *sede vacante*?**

Upon a vacancy in the papacy, the governance of the Church and of Vatican City State passes to the **College of Cardinals**, which meets regularly during the transition. All cardinals not prevented from doing so by some legitimate reason must attend the daily meetings called **General Congregations**. General Congregations are entrusted with the more serious matters. A second type of meeting, known as the **Particular Congregation**, handles more routine matters. It is headed by the **Camerlengo** (Chamberlain) of the Church (currently Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone) who is assisted by three other cardinals selected by lot for three day-terms. In both the General and Particular Congregations, all decisions are made by majority vote. However, decisions which only the pope can make, such as the appointment of bishops, must await the election of a new pontiff.

#### **What is the meeting that elects the new pope?**

It is called a "conclave" meaning "with key" in Latin. The Popes are locked in the Sistine Chapel for their deliberations. No one else is permitted in the room during the deliberations. The room is swept for bugs and there are no mobile phones or recording devices or cameras permitted. .

**Do all cardinals participate in electing a new pope?**

No. Only cardinals under the age of 80 at the time of the pope's resignation or death are eligible to vote in papal elections. They are known as the cardinal **electors** and their number is limited to 120. This time there will be 115 Cardinals actually voting.

**Has the election of the pope always been the prerogative of the College of Cardinals?**

No. Until the fourth century, the election of a pope was similar to that period's process for electing any bishop. Neighboring bishops, the Roman clergy, and the laity of Rome all participated in the election. Papal elections from the fourth century to the eleventh century were clearly marked by the influence of various temporal rulers, including the Roman emperors and noble families. In 1059, during a Synod of Rome, Pope Nicholas II, issued the decree *In nomine domini* spelling out that papal electors were to be only the higher clergy of Rome (the cardinals). Pope Alexander III, at the Third Lateran Council of 1179, further decreed that only a two-thirds majority vote of the cardinals could validly elect a pope.<sup>4</sup>

**Among the cardinals, who are the key officials?**

During the Interregnum, two cardinals in particular are assigned special responsibilities: the **Camerlengo** of Holy Roman Church (Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone) and the **Dean of the College of Cardinals** (Angelo Sodano).

**Who is the Camerlengo and what are his duties?**

Upon a papal vacancy, the Camerlengo immediately becomes the administrator of the Church's property and finances during the transition. He also heads meetings of the Particular Congregation. Among some of the duties of the Camerlengo are officially ascertaining and certifying the pope's resignation or death, sealing the pope's study and bedroom, and destroying the Fisherman's Ring.

**Who is the Dean of the College of Cardinals and what are his responsibilities?**

The Dean of the College of Cardinals is a senior cardinal elected to his permanent position by the full College and approved by the pope. The Dean is responsible for notifying the other members of the College and calling them to Rome. The current Dean, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, was born in 1927. Since Cardinal Sodano is over 80, he will not participate in the conclave. His duties in the conclave will be carried out by the next senior cardinal Italian Giovanni Battista Re.

**What is the conclave?**

The word "conclave" has two meanings. First, it refers to the physical space where the cardinals meet to carry out the election of the new pope. Consistent with the word's Latin origin, *cum clave* or "with a key," the conclave has traditionally been a locked area to ensure the sequestration of the electors. The word "conclave" has also come to refer to the meeting of the cardinals at which a new pope is elected.

The practice of carrying out the papal election in conclave originated in 1268. Eighteen cardinals had assembled in the Italian town of Viterbo, where Pope Clement IV had died, to elect his successor. Two years and nine months later, no pope had been elected, and the frustrated townspeople decided to force a decision by walling up the doors of the meeting place. The cardinals' only contact with the outside was a small opening through which food was passed. Eventually, the townspeople even removed the roof of the building, exposing the electors to the elements. Pope Gregory X finally was elected on September 1, 1271, ending the longest papal election.

**Where is the conclave?**

Balloting for the new pope takes place in the **Sistine Chapel**. The Sistine Chapel, which is 133 feet long, 45 feet wide, and 65 feet high, is configured to accommodate a desk and leather chair for each cardinal elector. A table is set in front of the altar where the secret ballots will be counted.

**Have papal elections always taken place in Rome?**

No. It was customary for the election of a new pontiff to take place in the city where his predecessor had died.

### **Is housing for the cardinals part of the conclave?**

Yes. In elections prior to the conclave of 2005, living quarters were constructed in available space in the Apostolic Palace which could be sealed from the outside world. In 1978, most electors' "cells" were constructed by stretching canvas over a metal framework and were sparsely furnished with only a bed, a wash stand, a crucifix and a kneeler. Many did not have private baths.

*Universi Dominici Gregis* directs that the cardinal electors are now to stay in *Domus Sanctae Marthae* (St. Martha's House), a five-story, 130-room guest house near St. Peter's which opened in 1996. Because St. Martha's is not adjacent to the Sistine Chapel, thereby requiring transport between the two sites, the strict conclave enclosure is no longer possible. Consequently, Pope John Paul II included specific provisions for ensuring the segregation of the electors while in transit to and from the Sistine Chapel.

### **Who is allowed inside the conclave?**

The list of those allowed inside the conclave is very limited. In addition to the cardinal electors, the only other "conclavists" allowed to remain include: the secretary of the College of Cardinals; the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations; two masters of ceremonies; two papal sacristans; a cleric to assist the Dean of the College; a number of priests for hearing confessions; two doctors; a few staff for preparing meals and housekeeping; and a personal aide for any cardinal so ill or incapacitated that he needs one. All must be approved by the Particular Congregation and be sworn to absolute secrecy about anything they learn or observe during the conclave.

Two U.S. priests were among the non-cardinals who were conclavists in 1978. At the time of the first conclave in 1978, Cardinal Edward Egan, now the Archbishop Emeritus of New York, was a monsignor serving as a judge in the Roman Rota (the Church's high court on marriage matters). During the second conclave of 1978, **Archbishop Donald Wuerl, now the Archbishop of Washington**, was secretary to Cardinal John Wright, who had recently had surgery. All take an oath of secrecy. Non-Cardinals incur automatic excommunication if they violate the oath of secrecy.

### **Is it true that the limitation on those allowed inside the conclave, and the whole idea of segregating the cardinals, is to ensure the confidentiality of the process?**

Yes. In keeping with tradition, the secrecy of the proceedings is scrupulously guarded. The mandate for secrecy is repeated several times in *Universi Dominici Gregis*. In fact, the cardinals are required to take two separate oaths of secrecy at different times during the *sede vacante*. Under Pope Paul VI's 1975 constitution, the Sistine Chapel was cleared, searched for listening devices, and the entire conclave area sealed both inside and out. Likewise, earlier rules prohibiting electors from sending or receiving mail, using a telephone, television or radio, or reading newspapers are also retained. The secrecy rules extend to the period after the election unless the new pope gives explicit permission to disclose information.

### **When does the conclave begin?**

Fifteen to 20 days after the death or resignation of the pope. But on February 22, 2013, the feast of the Chair of the Apostle Peter, Pope Benedict XVI gave permission to the cardinals to move up the date of the conclave if they so chose. The cardinal electors assemble after a mass in St. Peter's and process to the Sistine Chapel. After taking an oath to observe the rules to observe absolute secrecy and to refuse any civil interference with the election, the order "*extra omnes*" ("all out") is given and everyone not authorized to remain in the conclave must leave.

### **When does the actual election begin?**

Voting may begin immediately after the Sistine Chapel has been cleared, if a majority of the electors so desire.

**What method is used for the election?** John Paul II's constitution permits election only by **scrutiny**, or secret ballot. He eliminated election by acclamation, which allowed the cardinals to proclaim a new pope unanimously.<sup>13</sup> He also eliminated election by delegation which empowered a small committee of electors to select a compromise candidate in the event of an electoral impasse. Pope Gregory X was elected in this way in 1271.

**Are there "election judges" like we'd see at polling places in the United States?**

Not exactly, but there is a group of cardinals who help to facilitate the election process. Before the voting begins, nine cardinals are selected by lot and without regard to seniority: three to serve as Scrutineers (vote counters); three to serve as *Infirmarii* (infirmarians), who distribute and collect ballots from any cardinals too ill to leave St. Martha's House; and three to serve as Revisers, those who double check the calculations of the Scrutineers after each balloting session.

**How does balloting actually take place?**

Disguising his handwriting, each cardinal writes the name of his selection on the ballot card and then proceeds by seniority to the altar to cast his vote. For the past 300 years, the receptacle for the ballots has been a 25-inch gold chalice, covered by a golden plate. Standing before the altar, each cardinal declares aloud: "I call as my witness Christ the Lord, who will be my judge, that my vote is given to the one whom, before God, I think should be elected." He then places his twice-folded ballot on the plate, which he tips so the card falls into the chalice. Then the unopened ballots are counted. If they do not correspond to the number of electors, they are burned and a new vote taken. If the numbers coincide, the ballots are opened and recorded by each of the Scrutineers, the last of whom reads aloud the name on each card so the other cardinals can keep a tally if they wish.

**How many votes are necessary to elect a pope?**

A candidate must receive two-thirds of the vote to be elected. (If the number of electors cannot be divided evenly by three, a two-thirds plus one vote is required.)

**What happens if no one gets a two-thirds majority?**

If no one has received the required two-thirds majority, the ballots are set aside, and a new vote begun immediately, with two votes each morning and two each afternoon until a new pope is elected.

**What gave rise to the custom of signaling a papal election with white smoke?**

At the end of each morning and afternoon session, the ballots from the two votes are burned together in a furnace near the Sistine Chapel. In the past, wet straw was added to the ballots of an indecisive vote to produce black smoke; dry straw was added to the ballots of a successful vote to produce white smoke, signaling the crowds in St. Peter's Square the outcome of the conclave's deliberations. In 1978 and 2005, a small vial of chemicals was substituted for the straw to produce the correctly colored smoke.

**What if there is an impasse?**

If, after three days, a pope has not been elected, the cardinals are directed to take a day for prayer and discussions. Voting then continues with a day-long break after each series of seven ballots.

**What if there is still no election?**

In *Universi Dominici Gregis*, Pope John Paul II decreed that if, after the fourth series of seven ballots, a pope has still not been elected, the cardinals may vote to change the rules to allow for the election from among the top two vote getters on the previous ballot. Pope Benedict XVI reinstated the rule in 2007 that a pope must always be elected by a two-thirds majority. None of the 11 conclaves since 1846 has lasted more than four days.

**What happens after someone has received the required number of votes?**

Upon the election of a new pope, the Dean of the College of Cardinals (or, in the Dean's absence, the most senior cardinal present) steps forward and asks the newly elected his assent: "Do you accept your canonical election as Supreme Pontiff?" If the one elected accepts and he is already a bishop, he is immediately the bishop of Rome, pope, and head of the College of Bishops. The Cardinal Dean then asks: "By what name do you wish to be called?"

**So the person elected doesn't have to be a bishop?** No. Technically, any baptized Catholic man who is not a heretic, or in schism, or notorious for simony can be elected pope. The last man who was not a bishop to be elected pope was Cardinal Mauro Alberto Cappellari, a Camaldolese monk and prefect of the former Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, who was elected in 1831 and took the name Gregory XVI. The last non-cardinal to be elected pope was in 1378 when the Archbishop of Bari became Pope Urban VI. During a period of intense rivalry between Roman noble families, at least three laymen were elected pope: Benedict VIII (1012-24); John XIX (1024-32); and Benedict IX (1032-44; 1045; 1047-48).

**Why does it take so long from the time white smoke appears until we find out who has been elected?**

As much as two hours can elapse from the first signs of white smoke over St. Peter's Square and the new pope's appearance on the central balcony of the Basilica. During that time, the new pope changes into the traditional white papal vestments and then returns to the Sistine Chapel where each of the electors offers a sign of homage and obedience.

**If it's not known who will be elected, are there white vestments in reserve for each cardinal?**

No, but there are three white cassocks tailored in advance to fit, at least roughly, any eventuality. In 1978, Rome's Gammarelli family designed cassocks to fit a tall-heavy, short-heavy or a medium-sized pope

**At what point does the public finally learn the name of the new pope?**

Soon after the new pope has received individual greetings from each of the cardinal electors, the senior cardinal deacon (in 2013, French Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran) will appear on the central balcony of St. Peter's and announce: *Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum. Habemus papam. Eminentissimum ac Reverendissimum Dominum, Dominum ...[baptismal name] Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae Cardinalem [surname] qui sibi nomen imposuit [chosen papal name]*.<sup>18</sup> Soon thereafter, the new pope appears and imparts his *Urbi et Orbi*<sup>19</sup> blessing. Before 1978, popes were formally crowned in a ceremony several days after their election. Pope John Paul I broke that tradition, preferring instead a simpler Mass of installation to inaugurate his pontificate.

**Has the pope always taken a new name when elected?**

No. In fact, before the eleventh century, popes commonly kept their baptismal names. The first known instance of a new pope choosing a different name was in 533, when a man bearing the name of a pagan god, Mercury, was elected; he chose the name John II. The practice became commonplace with the election of Sylvester II (999-1003).

Men baptized with the name Peter have chosen new names upon their election to the papacy out of deference to Peter the Apostle and first pope; John XIV, elected in 983, was the first to change his name from Peter. In all, the popes have chosen from a total of only 81 names. The most popular name of all has been John (with 23). Other popular names include Clement (14), Benedict (16), Gregory (16), Innocent (13), and Pius (12). Pope John Paul I was the first to choose a double name, and the last pope to choose a name without precedence was Pope Lando (913-14).