



Backgrounder: Electing a New Pope

February 28, 2013

What is a conclave?

The conclave is a gathering of all cardinals under the age of 80 for the purpose of electing a new pope. This meeting is usually held in the Sistine Chapel, after the death or retirement of a pope. The word conclave comes from the Latin words *cum clave*, meaning "with a key." This gathering is conducted under utmost secrecy. At one time, the cardinals were literally locked into the Sistine Chapel until they came to a decision.

When will the conclave begin?

In one of his last acts as pope, Benedict XVI gave the College of Cardinals the ability to depart from the usual 15-day waiting period to begin the next conclave, but only on the condition that all of the voting cardinals are present and a majority consent to proceeding earlier. The dean of the College of Cardinals will send a letter to all cardinals on March 1, calling them to Rome.

Who can become elected as the next pope?

Any baptized male Catholic can become pope. Current church law says he must be a bishop before taking office. Since the 15th century, a cardinal has always been chosen. Cardinals are senior church officials; usually bishops, who are appointed by the pope, consult with him on important church matters, and vote on his successor.

Who votes in the conclave?

Cardinals who are under 80 when the papal seat becomes vacant are eligible to vote in the conclave. They are known as Cardinal Electors. As of February 28, 2013, a total of 116 Cardinal Electors will be eligible to vote in the conclave. (However, it is expected that one of them will not attend due to poor health.) Currently there are a total of 207 cardinals from around the world, including 91 who are over 80. These older cardinals do not enter the conclave, but they are eligible to be elected pope. They also offer their insights and advice in meetings of the cardinals in the days before the conclave.

What happens in a conclave?

Upon entering the conclave, the cardinals swear an oath of secrecy. They are not allowed to communicate with anyone in the outside world during the conclave. Newspapers, television, radios, telephones, and all means of communication are forbidden. Secret ballots can be cast once on the first day of the conclave, then normally twice during each subsequent morning and evening session. If no person has received a two-thirds plus one vote, there is another vote. If no pope is elected after the second vote, the ballots are burned with straw or chemical additives so that black smoke emerges from the Sistine Chapel. Once a pope is elected, the paper is burned alone or with chemicals so that white smoke is produced.

What happens once a new pope is elected?

White smoke emerges from the smokestack on the roof of the Sistine Chapel once a new pope has been chosen. The bells at St. Peter's Basilica are also rung to signify the election of a new pope.

The newly elected pope is asked if he accepts the canonical election as supreme pontiff and is asked to choose the name he wishes to be called. If he accepts, the new pope goes into a small room next to the Sistine Chapel, where he is vested in white papal robes. He returns to the conclave and the cardinals congratulate him. The new pope is then presented to the crowd waiting at St. Peter's Square. From his balcony he delivers his first apostolic blessing. The papal inauguration takes place a few days later.

Are any Canadian Cardinals involved?

Currently, Canada has three cardinals, all of whom are active and eligible to vote in the next conclave:

- Thomas Cardinal Collins, Archbishop of Toronto;
- Jean-Claude Cardinal Turcotte, Archbishop Emeritus of Montreal;
- Marc Andre Cardinal Ouellet, P.S.S., a former Archbishop of Quebec who now serves in Rome as the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops.

Will Archbishop Smith be in Rome for the conclave?

As president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Smith will attend the inauguration ceremony for the new pope. He plans to leave for Rome once the date for the conclave is known.

Will Benedict XVI take part in the Conclave to elect his successor?

No, Benedict XVI will not take part in the Conclave to elect his successor, and he will not be part of the College of Cardinals meetings before the conclave.

What will Benedict XVI's name and title be after February 28?

According to Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi, he will keep the name "His Holiness, Benedict XVI," and be known as Pope Emeritus. Father Lombardi also explained that Benedict XVI will no longer use the "Fisherman's Ring," which will be destroyed along with the lead seal of the pontificate.

Where will Benedict XVI live after he retires as Pope?

Initially, for a period of two months, he will live in the papal residence of Castel Gandolfo. Afterward he will return to the Vatican to live in the Mater Ecclesiae cloistered convent.

Who will be in charge of the Vatican once Benedict's resignation takes effect?

The period between the death or resignation of a pope and the election of his successor, is called a *Sede Vacante* (vacant seat) or Papal Interregnum. During this time, most of the departments of the Roman Curia (the Vatican bureaucracy) are suspended from operation until a new pope is elected. The Camerlengo (Italian for chamberlain), Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, will function as the executive director of Vatican operations answerable to the College of Cardinals during the interregnum, primarily to carry out the College's decisions with regard to upcoming conclave.

Sources:

Vatican Information Service

<http://www.catholicnews.com/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-21412589>