



How a New Pope Is Chosen

We are certain: it is the eternal Pastor who leads his flock with the power of his Spirit and assures it in every age to the Pastors whom he has chosen.

—Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Members of the College of Cardinals, April 22, 2005

HOW A NEW POPE IS CHOSEN

BY JOHN THAVIS, CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

The voting by cardinals to elect the next pope takes place behind the locked doors of the Sistine Chapel, following a highly detailed procedure last revised by Pope Benedict XVI.

Under the rules, secret ballots can be cast once on the first day of the conclave, then normally twice during each subsequent morning and evening session. Except for periodic pauses, the voting continues until a new pontiff is elected.

Only cardinals under the age of 80 when the “*sede vacante*,” or the period between the death or lawful resignation of one pope and the election of his successor, begins are eligible to enter the conclave and vote for the next pope. In theory, any baptized male Catholic can be elected pope, but current church law says he must become a bishop before taking office; since the 15th century, the electors always have chosen a fellow cardinal.

Each vote begins with the preparation and distribution of paper ballots by two masters of ceremonies, who are among a handful of noncardinals allowed into the chapel at the start of the session.

Then the names of nine voting cardinals are chosen at random: three to serve as “scrutineers,” or voting judges; three to collect the votes of any sick cardinals who remain in their quarters at the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*; and three “revisers” who check the work of the scrutineers.

The paper ballot is rectangular. On the top half is printed the Latin phrase “*Eligo in Summum Pontificem*” (“I elect as the most high pontiff”), and the lower half is blank for the writing of the name of the person chosen.

After all the noncardinals have left the chapel, the cardinals fill out their ballots secretly, legibly, and fold them twice. Meanwhile, any ballots from sick cardinals are collected and brought back to the chapel.

Each cardinal then walks to the altar, holding up his folded ballot so it can be seen, and says aloud: “I call as my witness Christ the Lord who will be my judge, that my vote is given to the one who before God I think should be elected.” He places his ballot on a plate, or paten, and then slides it into a receptacle, traditionally a large chalice.

When all the ballots have been cast, the first scrutineer shakes the receptacle to mix them. He then transfers the ballots to a new urn, counting them to make sure they correspond to the number of electors.

The ballots are read out. Each of the three scrutineers examines each ballot one by one, with the last scrutineer calling out the name on the ballot, so all the cardinals can record the tally. The last scrutineer pierces each ballot with a needle through the word “*Eligo*” and places it on a thread, so they can be secured.

After the names have been read out, the votes are counted to see if someone has obtained a two-thirds majority needed for election. The revisers then double-check the work of the scrutineers for possible mistakes.

At this point, any handwritten notes made by the cardinals during the vote are collected for burning with the ballots. If the first vote of the morning or evening session is inconclusive, a second vote normally follows immediately, and the ballots from both votes are burned together at the end.

If a conclave has not elected a pope after 13 days, the cardinals pause for a day of prayer, reflection and dialogue, then move to a runoff election between the two cardinals who obtained the most votes on the previous ballot. The two leading cardinals do not vote in the runoff ballots, though they remain in the Sistine Chapel.

When a pope is elected, the ballots are burned immediately. By tradition, the ballots are burned dry—or with chemical additives—to produce white smoke when a pope has been elected; they are burned with damp straw or other chemicals to produce black smoke when the voting has been inconclusive.

PERIOD BETWEEN POPES INCLUDES MANY IMPORTANT ELEMENTS

By CAROL GLATZ, CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

What are the most important elements of the “interregnum,” or transition period between popes?

- At the beginning of the “sede vacante,” the College of Cardinals assumes governance of the church.
- The Roman Curia loses most cardinal supervisors and cannot act on new matters.
- The College of Cardinals begins daily meetings at the Vatican to deal with limited church business and conclave arrangements.
- Cardinals under 80 years of age enter into conclave 15-20 days after the beginning of the “sede vacante.”
- Voting for a new pope proceeds with two ballots each morning and afternoon; a two-thirds majority is needed to elect.
- Shortly after the pope is elected, his name is announced and he offers his first blessing to the world in St. Peter’s Square.

PRAYER FOR THE ELECTION OF A NEW POPE

ROMAN MISSAL, COLLECT

O God, eternal shepherd,
who govern your flock with unfailing care,
grant in your boundless fatherly love
a pastor for your Church
who will please you by his holiness
and to us show watchful care.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

HOW A POPE IS NAMED

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When the election has canonically taken place . . . the Cardinal who is first in order and seniority, in the name of the whole College of electors, then asks the consent

of the one elected in the following words: “Do you accept your canonical election as Supreme Pontiff?” And, as soon as he has received the consent, he asks him, “By what name do you wish to be called?” Then, the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations . . . draws up a document certifying acceptance by the new Pope and the name taken by him.

REFLECTION FROM POPE BENEDICT XVI

AUDIENCE WITH GERMAN PILGRIMS, APRIL 25, 2005

At the beginning of my journey in a ministry that I never even imagined and for which I felt inadequate, all of this gives me great strength and assistance. May God reward you for this!

When, little by little, the trend of the voting led me to understand that, to say it simply, the axe was going to fall on me, my head began to spin. I was convinced that I had already carried out my life’s work and could look forward to ending my days peacefully. With profound conviction I said to the Lord: Do not do this to me! You have younger and better people at your disposal, who can face this great responsibility with greater dynamism and greater strength.

I was then very touched by a brief note written to me by a brother cardinal. He reminded me that on the occasion of the Mass for John Paul II, I had based my homily, starting from the Gospel, on the Lord’s words to Peter by the Lake of Gennesaret: “Follow me!” I spoke of how again and again, Karol Wojtyła received this call from the Lord, and how each time he had to renounce much and to simply say: Yes, I will follow you, even if you lead me where I never wanted to go.

This brother cardinal wrote to me: Were the Lord to say to you now, “Follow me,” then remember what you preached. Do not refuse! Be obedient in the same way that you described the great Pope, who has returned to the house of the Father. This deeply moved me. The ways of the Lord are not easy, but we were not created for an easy life, but for great things, for goodness.

Thus, in the end I had to say “yes.” I trust in the Lord and I trust in you, dear friends. A Christian is never alone.

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