

## Voting

❖ Before the voting begins, several cardinals are chosen by lot to gather the ballots of the sick who cannot attend the regular voting session (and remain sequestered at St. Martha’s House); others are chosen to “scrutinize” the counting of the ballots. Voting begins with one ballot on the first day. In the following days, if needed, two ballots are held in the morning and two in the afternoon.

❖ The rectangular ballot paper has the words *Eligo in Summum Pontificem* (“I Elect As Supreme Pontiff”) on the upper half and space to write the name of the candidate on the lower half. Cardinals are asked to write the name of the person they choose, then fold the ballot twice. The cardinals carry their ballots to the altar and say 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.* They then place the ballot into the receptacle, bow, and return to their place.

❖ After all the ballots have been placed in the ballot box, they are immediately counted. Each ballot is pierced with a needle through the word *Eligo* and placed on a thread. After the names have been read out loud, the ends of the thread are tied in a knot. If someone has obtained two-thirds of the votes, the canonically valid election of the Roman Pontiff has taken place.

❖ Immediately after the ballots have been checked and before the cardinal electors leave the Sistine Chapel, all the ballots are to be burned, along with any notes a cardinal may have written.

❖ If no pope has been elected by a two-thirds majority after three days, voting is suspended for one day of prayer, discussion, and spiritual exhortation. After a series of seven further ballots, the process may again be halted for reflection, until finally only the two cardinals who received the most votes in the last ballot are eligible in a runoff election. The two candidates, however, do not themselves have the right to vote.

## 8. Can Someone “Campaign” to Become Pope?

No. Although there is always speculation as to who might become pope, the choice is often a surprise. In 1958, for instance, few expected someone as old as Blessed John XXIII, age seventy-seven, to be elevated.

## 9. Can a Man Refuse to Accept the Office of the Papacy?

Yes, although it is unlikely. Rumor has it that some individuals have declined the office, but because the events of the conclave are secret, no one knows for certain if this has occurred.

## 10. When Does the New Pope Assume Office?

Upon acceptance of the office, the new pope states the name by which he will be known, and the cardinals pledge their allegiance to him. Tradition holds that the pope then greets the faithful by appearing in his new robes of office. Three sets of vestments — in small, medium, and large — are prepared ahead of time to accommodate the dimensions of the new pope. From the moment of his election, the pope assumes responsibility for governing the Church.

## A Prayer for the Holy Father

Oh God, source of all knowledge and goodness, look with favor upon your servant, whom you have chosen to shepherd your Church here on earth. Give him wisdom and courage, strength and health, compassion and knowledge. Keep him close to you as he guides the flock you have entrusted to him. Grant him by his word and example to be a faithful and holy leader and keep him in your care now and all the days of his life. Amen.



## Did You Know?

❖ The longest the Church has been without a pope was 1268-1271, when Gregory X was finally elected. The election took so long the faithful finally put the cardinals on a strict diet of bread and water.

❖ The first Roman to be elected pope was St. Anacletus in 76.

❖ The last Roman was Pius XII in 1939.

❖ The first Italian pope was St. Linus in 67.

❖ The last conclave held outside Rome was in Venice in 1800; Pius VII was elected.

## For More Information:

Apostolic Constitution *Universi Dominici Gregis*, “On the Vacancy of the Apostolic See and the Election of the Roman Pontiff” (Pope John Paul II, February 22, 1996), [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

— *De Aliquibus Mutationibus* (Amendment) (Pope Benedict XVI, June 11, 2007).

*Code of Canon Law*, No. 332 [www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/\\_P16.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P16.HTM)

Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 18 (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council) [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, III (First Vatican Ecumenical Council)

*Our Sunday Visitor’s Catholic Almanac*, Matthew Bunson (yearly editions).

*Our Sunday Visitor’s Encyclopedia of Catholic History*, Matthew Bunson (Our Sunday Visitor, 2004).

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# How the Church Chooses a Pope



And Jesus answered him, “... And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.”

— Matthew 16:17-18



Thousands gather in Vatican Square, waiting for the sign that a new pope has been elected. All watch as the dark wisps of smoke ascending from the Sistine Chapel turn to white, and a cheer arises that will encircle the globe. The new earthly leader of the Roman Catholic Church has been chosen.



### The Pope Bishop of Rome, Vicar of Jesus Christ, Servant of the Servants of God

It all begins in Rome, where the man who will be Vicar of Jesus Christ (Christ's representative on earth) is chosen not to rule, but to serve. He is elected Bishop of Rome and pastor and Supreme Pontiff of the universal Church.

#### 1. Who Can Become Pope?

One of the cardinals from the College of Cardinals

usually is elevated to the office of pope, but any male in good standing with the Church could be elected. If he is not a bishop, he must first be ordained. A layman could be chosen. The election of a heretic or a schismatic, however, is forbidden.

#### 2. Who Chooses the Pope?

The college of electors of the Supreme Pontiff is composed of the cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church, excluding those eighty or older. At the time of the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI in February 2013, 117 of the 209 cardinals were eligible to vote. During the time of a papal election, active campaigning is forbidden and debate is frowned on. The cardinals are to rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

#### 3. Can a Pope Resign?

Yes. As was demonstrated by Pope Benedict XVI, a pope may resign. His resignation is discussed in the Church's Code of Canon Law. A pontiff may resign as long as he does so freely and not under some form of threat or pressure. A pope's resignation has the full force of law at the time it is given. While resignations are not unprecedented, they are very rare. Prior to the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI, the last pope to step down was Pope Gregory XII in 1415.

#### 4. How Soon After a Pope's Death or Resignation Is the New Pope Elected?

At least fifteen days after the death or resignation of the pope and not more than twenty, the cardinals meet in the morning to celebrate the Eucharist. They proceed that afternoon to the Sistine Chapel, where deliberation and voting take place.

#### 5. Who Rules the Church Until a Pope Is Elected?

During the vacancy of the Apostolic See, the chief figure is the Cardinal Camerlengo (the Chamberlain of the Holy Roman Church), who has the task of organizing the papal funeral and the conclave. The Camerlengo works with the College of Cardinals in taking care of ordinary Church business and emergency matters, but his priority is the election of a new pope. Until then, no one person is the ruling authority for the Church.

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Upon the death or resignation of a pope, the cardinals and archbishops who head departments of the Roman Curia cease to exercise their offices. A handful of officials, in particular the Camerlengo, continue their functions, submitting to the College of Cardinals matters that would have been referred to the Supreme Pontiff.

#### 6. What Is the Conclave?

The conclave, from the Latin words for "with" and "key," refers to the enclosed meeting of cardinals to elect the pope. In 1274, Pope Gregory X initiated the practice of locking the doors both to prevent outside influences and to hasten the process — the papacy had been vacant for two years and nine months before his own election. The conclave is traditionally held in the Sistine Chapel. While the electors used to stay in makeshift sleeping quarters around the chapel, they now stay at St. Martha's House, a guest facility for dignitaries and others visiting in the Vatican State. One of the best-known traditions is the burning of ballots. If the smoke that rises from the Sistine Chapel is black (made so by the addition of chemicals, and in earlier days, damp straw), no pope has been chosen. When the smoke is white, the Church rejoices for her new pontiff.

#### 7. How Is the Pope Chosen?

The pope is chosen by secret ballot. During the election, the cardinals are forbidden to communicate with the outside world "whether by writing, by telephone or by any other means of communication." Before beginning, the cardinals take a solemn oath of secrecy (see box). Then the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations orders all those not taking part in the conclave to leave the Sistine Chapel.

#### The Oath of Secrecy

Anyone breaking the vow of secrecy is subject to "grave penalties according to the judgment of the future pope," including the possibility of excommunication. The cardinals may not receive newspapers or periodicals of any sort, listen to the radio, watch television, and presumably not use the Internet or e-mail until a new pope is elected.

*I, N.N., promise and swear that, unless I should receive a special faculty given expressly by the newly elected pontiff or by his successors, I will observe absolute and perpetual secrecy with all who are not part of the College of Cardinal electors concerning all matters directly or indirectly related to the ballots cast and their scrutiny for the election of the Supreme Pontiff.*

*I likewise promise and swear to refrain from using any audio or video equipment capable of recording anything which takes place during the period of the election within Vatican City, and in particular anything which in any way, directly or indirectly, is related to the process of the election itself. I declare that I take this oath fully aware that an infraction thereof will make me subject to the spiritual and canonical penalties which the future Supreme Pontiff will see fit to adopt, in accordance with Canon 1399 of the Code of Canon Law.*

*So help me God and these Holy Gospels which I touch with my hand.*



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