



Papal Transitions

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. In the 20th century this transition averaged just 17 days. It is also referred to as the Interregnum, a reference to the days when popes were also temporal monarchs who reigned over vast territories. This situation has almost always been created by the death of a pope, but it may also be created by resignation.

When was the last papal transition?

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. He died very unexpectedly on September 28, 1978, shocking the world and calling the cardinals back to Rome for the second time in as many months. The second transition in 1978 ended with the election of Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtyła – John Paul II – on October 16, 1978.

How are the events of the transition determined?

The death of a pope triggers a rapid succession of ceremonies and rites dictated by papal decree and heavily influenced by centuries of tradition. 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. The personal wishes of the deceased pontiff, especially with regard to his funeral and burial, are also very important. A vacancy created by resignation would also trigger many of these activities.

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**¹ which meets regularly during the transition. Once informed of the vacancy, all cardinals not prevented from doing so by some legitimate reason must attend the daily meetings called **General Congregations**. (Those who have reached their 80th birthday

¹ Words in bold may be found in the Glossary at the end of this Backgrounder.

before the vacancy occurred may choose not to attend.) General Congregations are entrusted with the more serious matters, including making arrangements for the funeral and burial of the pope and the upcoming election. 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 Eduardo Martinez Somalo) who is assisted by three other cardinals -- one from each order of cardinal (see Glossary) -- 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 or the convening of the Synod of Bishops, must await the election of a new pontiff.

Who makes up the General Congregations and what is their role?

The General Congregations are made up of all the members of the College of Cardinals not legitimately impeded from attendance. Within a day or two of the pope's death, the Cardinals who live in Rome, other cardinals who may be in Rome, and those already arrived from around the world for the pope's funeral, are called into session to begin the daily meetings at which decisions are made regarding the funeral and burial of the pope. The **Dean of the College of Cardinals** (currently Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) presides, and all decisions are by majority vote.

The tasks of the General Congregations are spelled out in *Universi Dominici Gregis* (#13). The cardinals are to:

- swear an oath to observe the provisions of *Universi Dominici Gregis*;
- schedule nine funeral Masses for the pope, ensuring that he is buried between the fourth and sixth day after death;
- oversee the work of a commission, consisting of the Cardinal Camerlengo and the two cardinals who served the previous pontificate as Secretary of State (currently Cardinal Angelo Sodano) and President of the Pontifical Commission for Vatican City State (currently U.S. Cardinal Edmund Szoka), which is entrusted with making detailed preparations for the conclave;
- designate two individuals who will present meditations to the cardinals regarding the gravity and importance of the conclave;
- review and approve expenses;
- read any documents left by the pope for the College of Cardinals;
- draw lots for the assignment of rooms for the electors;
- set the date and time for the beginning of the conclave.

Do all cardinals participate in electing a new pope?

No. Only cardinals under the age of 80 at the time of the pope's death are eligible to vote in papal elections (by order of Pope Paul VI in 1970 and reaffirmed by Pope John Paul II in *Universi Dominici Gregis*).² They are known as the cardinal **electors** and their number is limited to 120.

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

² Cardinals who turn 80 *after* the pope's death or the vacancy occurs are eligible to vote.

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).³ 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.⁴

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 and the Dean of the College of Cardinals.

Who is the Camerlengo and what are his duties?

Upon the death of the pope, 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 assigned to the Camerlengo are officially ascertaining and certifying the pope's death, sealing the pope's study and bedroom, and destroying the Fisherman's Ring. The current Camerlengo, Cardinal Martinez Somalo, was appointed by Pope John Paul II in April 1993. Born in 1927, he began his career in the Vatican in 1956 at the Secretariat of State. He was elevated to the College of Cardinals in 1988.

Since the Camerlengo certifies the pope's death, is he the person who officially initiates everything that follows?

In a way, yes. Today, modern medical technology easily confirms that death has occurred, but in ages past that determination was less scientific. In a ceremony that was used into the twentieth century, the Camerlengo would lightly tap the forehead of the pope three times with a small silver mallet, calling out his baptismal name. It was believed that no one could remain asleep at the sound of his baptismal name. Failure to rouse the pope resulted in the simple declaration: "The pope is dead."

What is the Fisherman's Ring and why is its destruction significant?

The **Fisherman's Ring** is a signet ring engraved with the image of St. Peter fishing from a boat and encircled with the name of the reigning pope. It is not worn by the pope. Rather, it is used to seal important documents. With its destruction, the power of the deceased pope is symbolically extinguished. In what has traditionally been a private ceremony, a small group of cardinals, together with members of the papal household and the Swiss Guard, enter the pope's apartments to witness the ring's destruction. After the ring has been inspected by those present,

³ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Popes, Election of"

⁴ Charles Burns, *The Election of a Pope* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1997), 35.

the Camerlengo defaces the ring with a silver knife. After a second inspection, the ring is placed on a lead block and struck with a silver mallet by the Camerlengo until it is destroyed.

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 cardinal-bishops (see definition of the College of Cardinals below) approved by the pope. During the *sede vacante*, he presides over the General Congregations and serves as the first among equals within the College. He is responsible for notifying international leaders and the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See of the pope's death. The Dean is also responsible for notifying the other members of the College and calling them to Rome. The current Dean, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, was born in 1927, elevated to the College of Cardinals in 1977, and confirmed as Dean in December 2002.

What happens if the pope is not in Rome when he dies?

If the pope dies outside of Rome, "it is the task of the College of Cardinals to make all necessary arrangements for the dignified and reverent transfer of the body" to St. Peter's Basilica.⁵ In 1978, Pope Paul VI was at his summer residence at Castel Gandolfo, about 20 miles outside of Rome, when he died. Pope Pius XII was also at Castel Gandolfo when he died in 1958.

Will the pope lie in state?

Yes. Traditionally, he is vested in the white vestments of the pope, with a red and gold **chasuble**. (Red is the papal mourning color.⁶) In 1978, both Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul I also wore a white **miter** trimmed in gold.

Who will make the arrangements for the pope's funeral?

The College of Cardinals, during one of the first General Congregations, will make the arrangements. They will be guided by Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Constitution *Universi Dominici Gregis*, his personal wishes, and tradition.

Of the funeral and burial of the pope, *Universi Dominici Gregis* says very little. The cardinals are to celebrate memorial Masses for nine consecutive days, known as the *novendiales*. Burial is to take place between four and six days after the death of the pope. When Pope Paul VI died in 1978, his solemn funeral Mass in St. Peter's Square, televised around the world, began the nine days of memorial Masses celebrated by the cardinals in the several **basilicas** of Rome.

Because the Apostolic Constitution is short on specifics with regard to the pope's funeral and burial, his personal wishes and ancient traditions offer the cardinals some guidance. As requested in his will, Pope Paul VI's funeral was dignified by its austerity. For the open-air Mass on the steps of St. Peter's Basilica, his simple cypress coffin lay on an oriental carpet before the altar, marked only by an ebony cross and an open Book of the Gospels. In place of a eulogy, he

⁵ John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Universi Dominici Gregis*(UDG), n. 29.

⁶ John Muthig "Papal Funeral Saturday Evening in Rome," Catholic News Service, 8 Aug. 1978.

requested a homily be given on the Scripture readings for the Mass. Less than two months later, the same form was used for the funeral of Pope John Paul I.

Is the pope's coffin always made of cypress?

In fact, three coffins are used. The innermost coffin is made of cypress to signify the pope's humanity. Before burial, the cypress coffin is sealed in an 800-pound lead coffin which bears a skull and crossbones. The outermost coffin is made of elm to symbolize the great dignity of the pope.⁷ Both the lead and elm coffins bear bronze plaques with the name of the pope and the significant dates of his life. For example, the inscription for Paul VI read: "*Corpus Pauli VI P.M. -- Vixit annos LXXX menses X dies X -- Ecclesiae universali prae fuit -- annos XV menses I dies XVI -- Decessit dies VI mensis Augusti -- Anno Domini MCMLXXVIII*"⁸

What other traditions are associated with the burial of the pope?

In addition to the triple coffin, another tradition has been the placement of several items in the pope's coffin before it is sealed: a notarized death certificate, a copy of the prepared funeral homily, copies of significant documents associated with his pontificate, a red velvet pouch containing the coins and medals struck during his papacy, as well as the ruined Fisherman's Ring.⁹

Where does burial take place?

In the modern era, papal burials have taken place in the crypt beneath St. Peter's Basilica in a private ceremony. Paul VI requested that, instead of a mausoleum for his resting place, he be buried in the earth; a simple marble slab marks his grave.

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 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

⁷ Charles Burns, 12. Also, James-Charles Noonan, Jr., *The Church Visible: The Ceremonial Life and Protocol of the Roman Catholic Church*, (New York: Viking), 29.

⁸ "The body of Paul VI -- He lived 80 years, 10 months, 10 days -- He governed the universal church -- 15 years, 1 month, 16 days -- He died August 6 -- Year of Our Lord 1978."

⁹ John Maher, "Cypress coffin placed in two others," Catholic News Service, 12 Aug. 12, 1978; and Noonan, 29.

elements. Pope Gregory X finally was elected on September 1, 1271, ending the longest papal election.

The word "conclave" has also come to refer to the meeting of the cardinals at which a new pope is elected.

Where is the conclave?

Balloting for the new pope takes place in the **Sistine Chapel**¹⁰. Preparations begin almost immediately after the death of the pope, overseen by the Camerlengo. 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?

It was customary for the election of a new pontiff to take place in the city where his predecessor had died. Pope Gregory X, elected in 1272 after the longest transition in papal history (see above), formally decreed that the cardinals must assemble for papal elections within ten days after the pope's death, in the city where the pope died, and with the cardinal-electors having no contact with the outside world.¹¹

Is housing for the cardinals part of the conclave?

Yes. For previous elections, 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 1996.¹² 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.¹³

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

¹⁰ *UDG*, n. 50.

¹¹ Burns, 20. Also J.N.D. Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Popes*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1986, p. 198.

¹² *UDG*, n. 42.

¹³ *UDG*, n.43.

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.¹⁴ All must be approved by the Particular Congregation and be sworn to absolute secrecy about anything they learn or observe during the conclave.

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. With lodging now provided at St. Martha's House, the provisions for sealing the conclave have been dropped. Provisions for sweeping the Sistine Chapel and the surrounding areas for audiovisual equipment that could record or broadcast the proceedings are retained, however. 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 of the pope, the cardinals are directed to gather in St. Peter's Basilica for a votive Mass *Pro eligendo Papa* invoking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the task that awaits them.¹⁵ Later, the cardinal electors reassemble and process to the Sistine Chapel. After taking an oath to observe the rules laid out in John Paul's constitution, to observe absolute secrecy, and to refuse any civil interference with the election,¹⁶ the order *extra omnes*¹⁷ ["all out"] is given and everyone not authorized to remain in the conclave must leave.

¹⁴ 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 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, Bishop Donald Wuerl, now the bishop of Pittsburgh, was secretary to Cardinal John Wright, who had recently had surgery.

¹⁵ Burns, 28.

¹⁶ *UDG*, nn. 52 and 53. The Cardinal Dean, or the senior cardinal present, reads: "We, the Cardinal electors present in this election of the Supreme Pontiff promise, pledge and swear, as individuals and as a group, to observe faithfully and scrupulously the prescriptions contained in the Apostolic Constitution of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, *Universi Dominici Gregis*, published on 22 February 1996. We likewise promise, pledge and swear that whichever of us by divine disposition is elected Roman Pontiff will commit himself faithfully to carrying out the *munus Petrinum* (Petrine office) of Pastor of the Universal Church and will not fail to affirm and defend strenuously the spiritual and temporal rights and the liberty of the Holy See. In a particular way, we promise and swear to observe with the greatest fidelity and with all persons, clerical or lay, secrecy regarding everything that in any way relates to the election of the Roman Pontiff and regarding what occurs in the place of the election, directly or indirectly related to the results of the voting; we promise and swear not to break this secret in any way, either during or after the election of the new Pontiff, unless explicit authorization is granted by the same Pontiff; and never to lend support or favor to any interference, opposition or any other form of intervention, whereby secular authorities of whatever order and degree or any group of people or individuals might wish to intervene in the election of the Roman Pontiff."

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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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?

Each of the Cardinal electors, according to the order of precedence, then takes the oath according to the following formula:

"And I, N. Cardinal N., do so promise, pledge and swear. Placing his hand on the Gospels, he will add: So help me God and these Holy Gospels which I touch with my hand."

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, n. 53.

¹⁸ The last recorded instance took place in 1154 when Cardinal Nicholas Breakspear, the only Englishman to serve as pope, was elected. He served as Pope Adrian IV. (Burns, 48.)

¹⁹ Noonan, 38.

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.) Regardless of whether any single candidate has received the mandatory two-thirds vote, the ballots are inspected and the Scrutineers' calculations double checked by the Revisers.

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, 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.²⁰

What if there is still no election?

If, after the fourth series of seven ballots, a pope has still not been elected by a two-thirds majority, the cardinals may vote to change the rules to allow for the election of a new pope by an absolute majority (half plus one). They may also choose to limit the candidates to the top two vote getters on the previous ballot, with an absolute majority required for election in this case as well.

While Pope John Paul II provided this new means for breaking a deadlock in future conclaves, none of the 10 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?"²¹ If he is not already a bishop, he is immediately ordained a bishop by the Dean or the most senior cardinal present.

²⁰ *UDG*, #74.

²¹ *Ibid.*, #87.

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).²²

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 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]*.²³

Soon thereafter, the new pope appears and imparts his *Urbi et Orbi*²⁴ 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?

²² Kelly, pp. 139-144.

²³ I announce to you a great joy. We have a pope! His Most Eminent and Reverend Lord, Lord [baptismal name] Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church [surname], who has chosen for himself the name of [chosen papal name].

²⁴ To the City and to the World.

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 (99-1003).

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 (15), 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).

Glossary

basilica - a church of greater than average importance. There are four major basilicas in Rome: St. Peter's, St. John Lateran, St. Paul's Outside the Walls, and St. Mary Major.

Cardinal Camerlengo - Chamberlain of the Holy Roman Church; a cardinal with special responsibilities, especially during the time between the death of a pope and the election of his successor. He safeguards and administers the goods and revenues of the Holy See and heads particular congregations of cardinal for special purposes during the transition.

chasuble - the outer liturgical vestment worn by the presider at Mass.

College of Cardinals - juridic collegial body, composed of cardinals, that provides for the election of the pope and that assists the pope in governing the universal Church on matters of great import, by participation in consistories, formal meetings of cardinals in the presence of the pope. The College has three orders, or ranks -- cardinal-bishop, cardinal-priest, and cardinal-deacon.

Dean of the College of Cardinals - presides over the College of Cardinals; acts as the first among equals, but has no jurisdiction over the other cardinals; elected by the full College, approved by the pope, and required to reside in Rome.

elector - also known as cardinal elector; a member of the College of Cardinals who has not yet reached his 80th birthday before the pope dies. Pope Paul VI introduced the rule prohibiting cardinals over the age of 80 from participating in the election of a pope in 1970.

Fisherman's Ring - signet ring engraved with the image of St. Peter fishing from a boat and encircled with the name of the reigning pope. It is not worn by the pope. It is used to seal briefs and is destroyed after each pope's death.

General Congregation - the full College of Cardinals, acting collectively to administer the Church and the Vatican City State during the vacancy of the Holy See.

miter - the headcovering worn by bishops and some abbots during liturgical celebrations. Two triangular pieces of stiffened material are sewn together on the sides with an opening for the head at the base. Two bands of cloth, called lappets, hang from the back. Eastern Catholic bishops wear crowns.

novendiales - nine memorial Masses celebrated by the cardinals in the basilicas of Rome for the deceased pope on consecutive days before the beginning of the conclave.

papabili - among commentators, those cardinals considered to be the leading contenders to be elected pope

Particular Congregation - a committee of four cardinals, headed by the Camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church, entrusted with deciding routine matters during the vacancy of the Holy See. The three assistants to the Camerlengo are chosen by lot from among those cardinals eligible to vote in conclave. They serve for three-day terms, being replaced by the same method.

scrutiny- according to the rules established by Pope John Paul II, the only valid method by which cardinals, casting secret ballots, may elect a new pope.

Sistine Chapel - named for Pope Sixtus IV (d. 1484), the principal chapel of the Vatican Apostolic palace. Famed for its frescoed walls by various artists, especially the ceiling and altar wall painted by Michelangelo; mandated by Pope John Paul II to be the location of future papal elections.

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