

## The Workings of a Conclave

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The election of a pope is one of the most ancient and carefully guarded traditions in the world. Known as a Papal Conclave, this process is rich in history, symbolism, and strict regulation. The word conclave comes from the Latin *cum clave* meaning “with a key,” referring to the tradition of locking the electors away until a decision is reached.

This practice originated in the 13th century after long papal vacancies caused political instability. The conclave ensures that the choice of pope is made prayerfully, free from external pressures. The conclave process is governed by *Universi Dominici Gregis* (hereafter UDG), an apostolic constitution issued by Pope St. John Paul II in 1996, with two later revisions by Pope Benedict XVI. Pope Francis made no changes to the document.

Only cardinals under the age of 80 at the time of the pope’s death or resignation are eligible to vote in the following conclave. The maximum number of voting cardinals allowed by UDG is 120 although a pope can appoint as many cardinals as he wants at any given time. Currently, there are 252 total living cardinals, of which 135 are eligible to enter the conclave and are termed as “cardinal electors.” Of the 135 cardinal electors, there are reports that one or two may not participate due to health reasons. Other officials such as medics, cooks, secretaries, and other clergy assist the cardinals but are sworn to secrecy and do not participate in voting.

After a pope dies or resigns his office, the See of Rome becomes vacant (*sede vacante*). The College of Cardinals organizes general congregations (meetings) to handle the Church's interim affairs and prepare for the conclave. A conclave typically begins 15 to 20 days after the vacancy to allow time for a papal funeral in the event of the death of the previous pope, travel, and preliminary discussions.

The College of Cardinals as a body governs the day-to-day workings of the Church but they may not make any changes or innovations concerning the Church. They also may not act in any way that would infringe on the prerogatives of the Bishop of Rome nor may they make any changes to UDG or to how a conclave is organized and functions.

The actual conclave is held in the Sistine Chapel within Vatican City. The cardinals live nearby in the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, a Vatican guesthouse. Strict measures are taken to maintain secrecy: jamming devices are used to block external communications, and all locations are swept for electronic listening devices. The cardinal electors are sworn to confidentiality under pain of automatic excommunication.

The current conclave is scheduled to begin on Wednesday, May 7. On that first day Mass for the Election of the Pope (*Missa Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice*) will be celebrated, invoking the Holy Spirit's guidance. Later the cardinal electors will process into the Sistine Chapel singing the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* ("Come, Creator Spirit").



After prayers, a meditation, and the swearing of an oath by each elector, all nonelectors must leave. *Extra omnes* (Everyone out!) is exclaimed and the doors to the Sistine Chapel are locked. Voting is conducted under strict protocols. Each cardinal elector writes a name legibly on a ballot with the instruction to disguise his handwriting, folds it, and places it into a large chalice/ciborium atop the altar.



The ballots say on the top half *Eligo in Summum Pontificem* (I elect as Supreme Pontiff), and the elector writes his choice's name on the bottom half. Each elector must process to the chapel altar before the fresco of Michelangelo's "Last Judgment" and swear an oath before placing their ballot in the vessel: I call as my witness Christ the Lord, who is to judge me, that I choose him whom according to God I judge ought to be elected.

There are up to four votes per day: two in the morning and two in the afternoon; generally, one vote is taken on the first day but that is not required. Each round involves distributing ballots, voting, counting, verifying, and burning the ballots.

Once a vote is complete, the ballots are counted to make sure that there are no more or no less ballots than there are electors. The ballots are reviewed by three electors called scrutineers who are chosen by lot.

They individually review each ballot with the third scrutineer announcing each vote. A candidate must receive a two-thirds majority to be elected pope. Ballots are burned in a special stove after the two morning votes and after the two afternoon votes. If a vote is

successful, the ballots are immediately burned after that vote. To communicate results to the public, black smoke indicates no election, and white smoke signals a successful election. The ballots today are burned with chemicals to create the needed color. Formerly, the ballots were burned with wet straw to achieve black smoke or dry to achieve white smoke. Since 2005, bells have also been rung to avoid confusion due to indiscernible smoke color in the event of a valid election. If voting is protracted for several days, there are mechanisms for the cardinal electors to pause for a day of prayer.

Upon receiving the necessary votes, the Dean of the College of Cardinals asks the elected cardinal: “Do you accept your canonical election as Supreme Pontiff?” If he accepts the newly elected pope becomes pope immediately with all rights, powers, and prerogatives. He is then asked: “By what name shall you be called?” He chooses a papal name. He then moves to the Sistine Chapel sacristy, nicknamed the “Room of Tears,” and is dressed in papal vestments which have been prepared in several sizes. The Cardinal Protodeacon then announces to the world from the central balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica: Habemus Papam (“We have a pope!”). The Cardinal Protodeacon’s announcement will follow the white smoke with anywhere from twenty to thirty minutes to one hour between the smoke and the announcement. He introduces the new pope by both his baptismal and new papal name. The new pope then appears and gives his first Urbi et Orbi (“to the city and to the world”) blessing.

For reference, here is a list of previous conclaves and their durations:

Pius XII, 1939: 2 days, 3 ballots; John XXIII, 1958: 4 days, 11 ballots; Paul VI, 1963: 3 days, 6 ballots; John Paul I, 1978: 2 days, 4 ballots; John Paul II, 1978: 3 days, 8 ballots; Benedict XVI, 2005: 2 days, 4 ballots; Francis, 2013: 2 days, 5 ballots.

## Cardinal electors by continent

Continent	Number	Percentage	Percentage of global Catholic population (2023)
<a href="#">Africa</a>	18	13.3%	20.0%
<a href="#">North America</a>	20	14.8%	20.4%
<a href="#">South America</a>	17	12.6%	27.4%
<a href="#">Asia</a>	23	17.0%	11.0%
<a href="#">Europe</a>	53	39.3%	20.4%
<a href="#">Oceania</a>	4	3.0%	0.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

### All 133 Cardinal electors arrive in Rome as Cardinals hold tenth General Congregation

The Cardinals hold their tenth General Congregation to prepare for the upcoming conclave, and continue their discussions on the state of the Church and their hopes for the future.

#### By Vatican News

The Director of the Holy See Press Office, Matteo Bruni, told reporters on Monday that the 179 Cardinals, including 132 Cardinal electors, participated in the tenth General Congregation. He noted that all 133 Cardinal electors are present in Rome, ahead of the conclave that starts on May 7. Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, the Dean of the College of Cardinals, told the Congregation that Cardinal Camerlengo Kevin Farrell drew lots on Saturday afternoon for the room assignments of the Cardinals. All will be accommodated at the Casa Santa Marta and the old Santa Marta.

The Cardinal electors, said Mr. Bruni, will be able to travel from the Casa Santa Marta to the Sistine Chapel as they wish, even on foot—but along a protected route. There were 26 interventions at the Congregation on Monday morning that touched on the following topics:

- Canon law and the role of the Vatican City State;
- The missionary nature of the Church;
- The role of Caritas in defending the poor;
- The presence of so many journalists was highlighted, seen as a sign that the Gospel has meaning for the world today—as a call to responsibility;
- The prayer during the COVID pandemic was recalled, as an open door of hope in a time of fear;
- Regarding the new Pope: many hope for a shepherd close to the people, a gateway to communion, gathering everyone in the blood of Christ, in a world where the global order is in crisis;
- The challenges of transmitting the faith, caring for creation, war, and a fragmented world were discussed;
- Concern was expressed over divisions within the Church;
- The role of women in the Church, in the context of synodality;
- Vocations, family, and the education of children were addressed;
- Reference was made to the documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially *Dei Verbum*, on how the Word of God is nourishment for the people of God.

Of the 252 members of the College of Cardinals at the time of Francis's death, 135 cardinal electors are eligible to participate in the subsequent conclave. Two cardinal electors have announced that they do not plan to attend, decreasing the expected number of participants to 133. To be elected pope, a candidate requires a two-thirds supermajority of the participating electors, or 89 votes.

Of the 135 eligible cardinal electors, 5 are cardinal bishops, 110 are cardinal priests, and 20 are cardinal deacons; 5 were created cardinals by Pope John Paul II, 22 by Pope Benedict XVI, and 108 by Pope Francis; 29 work in the service of the Holy See (such as in the Roman Curia), 79 are in pastoral ministry outside Rome, and 28 are retired. The oldest eligible cardinal elector is Carlos Osoro Sierra, at the age of 79, and the youngest is Mykola Bychok, at the age of 45. Another 116 cardinals are ineligible to participate in the conclave due to their age.

## The 133 Cardinals who will vote for the next Pope

1	Pietro Parolin	Italy	(age 70)
2	Fernando Filoni	Italy	(age 79)
3	Luis Antonio Tagle	Philippines	(age 67)
4	Robert Francis Prevost, OSA	United States	(age 69)
5	Louis Raphaël I Sako	Iraq	(age 76)
6	Vinko Puljić	Bosnia and Herzegovina	(age 79)
7	Peter Turkson	Ghana	(age 76)
8	Josip Bozanić	Croatia	(age 76)
9	Philippe Barbarin	France	(age 74)
10	Péter Erdő	Hungary	(age 72)
11	Stanisław Ryłko	Poland	(age 79)
12	Francisco Robles Ortega	Mexico	(age 76)
13	Daniel DiNardo	United States	(age 75)
14	Odilo Scherer	Brazil	(age 75)
15	Robert Sarah	Guinea	(age 79)
16	Raymond Leo Burke	United States	(age 76)
17	Kurt Koch	Switzerland	(age 75)
18	Kazimierz Nycz	Poland	(age 75)
19	Malcolm Ranjith	Sri Lanka	(age 77)

20	Reinhard Marx	Germany	(age 71)
21	João Braz de Aviz	Brazil	(age 77)
22	Thomas Collins	Canada	(age 78)
23	Wim Eijk	Netherlands	(age 71)
24	Giuseppe Betori	Italy	(age 78)
25	Timothy Dolan	United States	(age 75)
26	Rainer Woelki	Germany	(age 68)
27	James Michael Harvey	United States	(age 75)
28	Baselios Cleemis	India	(age 65)
29	Gerhard Ludwig Müller	Germany	(age 77)
30	Vincent Nichols	United Kingdom	(age 79)
31	Leopoldo Brenes	Nicaragua	(age 76)
32	Gérald Lacroix, ISPX	Canada	(age 67)
33	Jean-Pierre Kutwa	Ivory Coast	(age 79)
34	Orani João Tempesta, OCist	Brazil	(age 74)
35	Mario Aurelio Poli	Argentina	(age 77)
36	Philippe Ouédraogo	Burkina Faso	(age 79)
37	Chibly Langlois	Haiti	(age 66)
38	Manuel Clemente	Portugal	(age 76)
39	Berh. D. Souraphiel, CM	Ethiopia	(age 76)
40	John Dew	New Zealand	(age 76)



41	Charles Maung Bo, SDB	Myanmar	(age 76)
42	Kriengsak Kovitvanit	Thailand	(age 75)
43	Francesco Montenegro	Italy	(age 78)
44	Daniel Sturla SDB	Uruguay	(age 65)
45	Arlindo Gomes Furtado	Cape Verde	(age 75)
46	Soane Patita Paini Mafi	Tonga	(age 63)
47	Dieudonné Nzapalainga, CSSp	Central African Republic	(age 58)
48	Carlos Osoro Sierra	Spain	(age 79)
49	Sérgio da Rocha	Brazil	(age 65)
50	Blase J. Cupich	United States	(age 76)
51	Jozef De Kesel	Belgium	(age 77)
52	Carlos Aguiar Retes	Mexico	(age 75)
53	John Ribat MSC	Papua New Guinea	(age 68)
54	Joseph W. Tobin, CSsR	United States	(age 72)
55	Juan José Omella	Spain	(age 79)
56	Anders Arborelius, OCD	Sweden	(age 75)
57	Angelo De Donatis	Italy	(age 71)
58	Joseph Coutts	Pakistan	(age 79)
59	António Marto	Portugal	(age 77)
60	Désiré Tsarahazana	Madagascar	(age 70)
61	Giuseppe Petrocchi	Italy	(age 76)

62	Thomas A. M. Maeda	Japan	(age 76)
63	Ignatius S. Hardjoatmodjo	Indonesia	(age 74)
64	Juan García Rodríguez	Cuba	(age 76)
65	Fridolin A. Besungu, OFM, Cap.	Dem. Republic of the Congo	(age 65)
66	Jean-Claude Hollerich, SJ	Luxembourg	(age 66)
67	Álvaro L. R. Imeri	Guatemala	(age 77)
68	Matteo Zuppi	Italy	(age 69)
69	Cristóbal L. Romero, SDB	Morocco	(age 72)
70	Antoine Kambanda	Rwanda	(age 66)
71	Wilton Daniel Gregory	United States	(age 77)
72	Jose Advincula OP	Philippines	(age 73)
73	Augusto Paolo Lojudice	Italy	(age 60)
74	Jean-Marc Aveline	France	(age 66)
75	Peter Okpaleke	Nigeria	(age 62)
76	Leonardo U. Steiner, OFM.	Brazil	(age 74)
77	Filipe Neri Ferrão	India	(age 72)
78	Robert McElroy	United States	(age 71)
79	Virgílio d. C. da Silva, SDB.	Timor-Leste	(age 57)
80	Oscar Cantoni	Italy	(age 74)
81	Anthony Poola	India	(age 63)
82	Paulo Cezar Costa	Brazil	(age 57)

83	William Goh	Singapore	(age 67)
84	Adalberto Martínez Flores	Paraguay	(age 73)
85	Giorgio Marengo IMC	Mongolia	(age 50)
86	Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM	Jerusalem	(age 60)
87	Stephen Brislin	South Africa	(age 68)
88	Ángel Sixto Rossi, SJ	Argentina	(age 66)
89	Luis José Rueda Aparicio	Colombia	(age 63)
90	Grzegorz Ryś	Poland	(age 61)
91	Stephen A. M. Mulla	South Sudan	(age 61)
92	José Cobo Cano	Spain	(age 59)
93	Protase Rugambwa	Tanzania	(age 64)
94	Sebastian Francis	Malaysia	(age 73)
95	Stephen C. Sau-yan, SJ	China (Hong Kong)	(age 65)
96	François-X. Bustillo, OFM Conv	France	(age 56)
97	Américo Aguiar	Portugal	(age 51)
98	Carlos Castillo Mattasoglio	Peru	(age 75)
99	Vicente Bokalic Iglic, CM	Argentina	(age 72)
100	Luis Cabrera Herrera, OFM	Ecuador	(age 69)
101	Fernando Chomalí Garib	Chile	(age 68)
102	Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi, SVD	Japan	(age 66)
103	Pablo Virgilio David	Philippines	(age 66)

104	Ladislav Nemet, SVD	Serbia	(age 68)
105	Jaime Spengler, OFM	Brazil	(age 64)
106	Ignace Bessi Dogbo	Ivory Coast	(age 63)
107	Jean-Paul Vesco, OP	Algeria	(age 63)
108	Dominique Mathieu, OFM Conv	Iran	(age 61)
109	Roberto Repole	Italy	(age 58)
110	Baldassare Reina	Italy	(age 54)
111	Frank Leo	Canada	(age 53)
112	Mykola Bychok, CSsR	Australia	(age 45)
113	Domenico Battaglia	Italy	(age 62)
114	Dominique Mamberti	France	(age 73)
115	Mario Zenari	Italy	(age 79)
116	Kevin Farrell	United States	(age 77)
117	Konrad Krajewski	Poland	(age 61)
118	José T. de Mendonça	Portugal	(age 59)
119	Michael Czerny, SJ	Canada	(age 78)
120	Mario Grech	Malta	(age 68)
121	Marcello Semeraro	Italy	(age 77)
122	Mauro Gambetti, OFM Conv	Italy	(age 59)
123	Arthur Roche	United Kingdom	(age 75)
124	Lazarus You Heung-sik	South Korea	(age 73)

125	Claudio Gugerotti	Italy	(age 69)
126	Víctor Manuel Fernández	Argentina	(age 62)
127	Emil Paul Tscherrig	Switzerland	(age 78)
128	Christophe Pierre	France	(age 79)
129	Ángel F. Artime, SDB	Spain	(age 64)
130	Rolandas Makrickas	Lithuania	(age 53)
131	Timothy Radcliffe, OP	United Kingdom	(age 79)
132	Fabio Baggio, CS	Italy	(age 60)
133	George Koovakad	India	(age 51)