

# Choosing a New Pope!

I'm sure you know that the pope is the leader of the Roman Catholic Church. So after a pope dies or resigns, a new pope must be found to replace the old one. But did you know that there is a special way which a new pope is chosen? The new pope is chosen by the College of Cardinals at the Conclave. Sound's important doesn't it? Well, the conclave is really just a big meeting and all the cardinals (the top bishops who wear red) vote on who they feel should be the next Pope. The conclave has a very special way of deciding on a new pope. There are a lot of rules they must follow and many things they must do! I'm going to tell you about a few of them.



The day before the conclave (the big meeting), the cardinals get together and listen to a sermon. This sermon tells about the Catholic Church and the things that need help in our church. The sermon also tells what qualities or abilities the new pope should have.

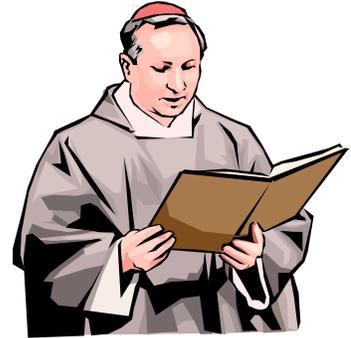
The next morning, on the day of the conclave, the cardinals celebrate Mass at St. Peter's Basilica. Then, in the afternoon, they meet at the Pauline Chapel in the



Palace of the Vatican and process to the Sistine Chapel while singing *Veni Creator Spiritus*. Once they are in the Sistine Chapel, each of the cardinals (There's about 120 or less.) places his hand on the gospels and makes an oath (that's a promise) to follow the rules of the conclave and the Catholic Church.

After each and every one of the cardinals have made this oath, all of the people in the Chapel who are not cardinals are asked to leave and the doors are closed. The conclave is meant to be done in total secret. Although a few servers, doctors and other helpers are allowed to remain, there are no reporters allowed in. Also, the cardinals are not to talk to anyone about the things that are happening. So they can't take their iphone into the chapel or post things on Facebook.

Once the cardinals are alone and everyone else has left, they hear another sermon about the state of the church and the virtues that the new pope should have. After that sermon is finished, the cardinals say a few prayers. After those prayers, they discuss all the rules and requirements of the conclave. Once they all understand the rules, they each vote for who they think should be the next pope! They write the name of the person they want to vote for on a special piece of paper, and fold it in half. As each of the cardinals adds his vote to the box, he must say an oath (a promise) to follow the rules of the conclave. After each cardinal has made this promise and voted they see who the winner is! They need two-thirds of the cardinals (that's about 80 cardinals) to agree on the same person, otherwise they do not have a winner and we do not yet have a new pope.



If no pope is chosen on the first day they come back the next day, and the cardinals vote 4 more times, twice in the morning and twice in the afternoon. If they do not get the votes needed to declare a pope they must get together again the next day, and the next day, and the next day till they have chosen a new



Folded paper ballot from the 1500's

pope! Each day they must vote 4 times, twice in the morning and twice in the afternoon. Before each vote they promise to follow the rules of the conclave. If the cardinals cannot agree and the voting continues for several days the cardinals will take a day off to listen to a sermon and pray. These

days off can happen every few days. If the voting continues for a really long time they will pick the two names that were most voted for and vote between them. Once they have a winner, the man who is voted as the new pope will need to say that he wants the job. If he accepts the job, he must pick a new name. Then, he becomes the new pope.

Have you heard about the Conclave smoke? Many people stand outside the Sistine Chapel and watch for smoke coming from the chimney. Why?

Well, after the cardinals vote they burn the ballots. The ballots are those little sheets of papers they use to write down their vote. Each time smoke comes from that chimney, the people watching outside know that the cardinals have voted again. It also tells them if a new pope has been chosen! Black smoke means that the cardinals have not agreed on a new pope. The cardinals add special chemicals to the fire to make the smoke look black. But if the smoke looks white, then they have agreed on a new pope! As the bells ring, the people watching outside cheer for joy!



White smoke from the Sistine Chapel Chimney



Once a pope has been chosen and he has agreed to do the job, the new pope is dressed in the clothes of a pope and taken to St. Peter's Balcony where he is presented to the people! There the new pope gives his first Papal blessing. This blessing is the first of many that he will give during his time as leader of the Roman Catholic Church!

**Please note:** There is much more that goes on behind the scenes at the Conclave. There are many rules and schedules they must follow. This article only touches on the major events. Also, the rules of the conclave change often.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Do you remember...**

In what chapel do they meet for the Conclave?

What color does a cardinal wear?

How many times a day do the cardinals vote? (after the first day)

Do the people outside know when the cardinals have voted?

What do the cardinals do each time before they vote?

## **Thinking question...**

What problems in the church might they talk about during the two sermons?

# Fun Facts about Conclaves

- ❖ In our modern age, the Sistine Chapel has to be “swept” for spy bugs. This is to ensure the things that happen in the conclave remain secret.
- ❖ During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the conclave may have had only a few cardinals attend due to the hardship of travel. The smallest conclave had only 7 cardinals!
- ❖ There are as many as 120 Cardinals in the Conclave.
- ❖ The cardinals cannot vote for themselves.
- ❖ Reporters have disguised themselves as servers to sneak into the conclave.
- ❖ At different points in history the Cardinals were locked in the Sistine Chapel. Food was given to them through a window. After three days of the conclave, the cardinals were only given one plate of food a day. After another five days they received only bread and water. This was to help ensure that they decided quickly.
- ❖ Some of the cardinals in past conclaves have voted for men who were not cardinals in the conclave, in fact some were not priests at all! But they first must be consecrated as deacon, priest, and bishop to be able to take office. (The head cardinal can do this.)
- ❖ Years ago, damp straw was used to make the smoke black, but the straw didn’t always work well. Today they use chemicals.
- ❖ Popes throughout history have changed the rules of the conclave. The popes who have changed the rules often made the new rules just after they have become pope. John Paul II and Benedict XVI made a few small changes, too.
- ❖ Pope Gregory XV changed the rule to have the Cardinals say an oath each time before they vote. He did this so the cardinals would stop making votes for friends out of courtesy. He had hoped this would shorten the length of the conclave.
- ❖ At one time the ballots were placed in a chalice; today they are placed in a large oval container.