



CARDINALS GATHER TO MOURN POPE, CHOOSE SUCCESSOR

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As Catholics throughout the world mourn the death of Pope John Paul II, the College of Cardinals has gathered in Rome to begin the process of deciding the next pontiff.

The 84-year-old Pope John Paul II, born Karol Wojtyla in 1920, will be buried Friday, according to tradition, in the grotto below St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

The announcement ends speculation that the Polish-born pope might be buried in his homeland. The pope did not leave instructions about his burial and funeral, so the details will be decided by the College of Cardinals.

The College of Cardinals

Cardinals -- who can be picked out of a crowd by their red clothing -- are chosen by the pope to serve in the College, which governs the church and administers the Holy See, or the governmental functions associated with the papacy.

The current College of Cardinals is made up of 183 cardinals from around the world. Only 117 of them are younger than 80 and eligible to choose the next pope. Of the 117 voting members, all but three were appointed by Pope John Paul II.

Fifteen to 20 days following the death of the pope the voting members of the College of Cardinals will begin a conclave to choose Pope John Paul II's successor. They will enter the Sistine Chapel declaring "Extra omnes!" -- Latin for "Everyone else out!"

This conclave can go on for days and will only end when the participants elect a new pope. White smoke from a Vatican chimney signals a conclusive vote of two-thirds majority plus one. There is also a possibility that a simple majority will pick the pope; if this happens, the conclave will send out a black smoke signal.

Prior to this highly secret conclave, all members of the College of Cardinals will meet daily in formal discussions called General Congregations to debate who might be the best candidate for the job of the pope.

The future pope

Although a pope can be any Roman Catholic priest, the successor is usually chosen from amongst the voting members of the College of Cardinals.

This group of 117 is a diverse lot. Although the Catholic Church is based in Rome, 83 percent are non-Italians. (Pope John Paul II was the first non-Italian pope in 455 years.) Nearly half of them, 56, hail from Europe; 11 come from the United States, 21 from Latin America, 11 from Africa and 11 from Asia.

Campaigning for the post or even discussing the succession prior to the nine-day mourning period, called the *novendiales*, is forbidden.

In fact, no one correctly predicted that Karol Wojtyla, the archbishop of Krakow, Poland would become pope in 1978.

Politicking in the usual sense was forbidden by Pope John Paul II in his 1996 constitution. Instead an “exchange of views” is expected. However, some possibilities are emerging about the next pope.

Although Americans rank only second in members of the College to the Italians, they are not expected to emerge with a papacy. A pope from a superpower could negatively impact the perceived neutrality of Vatican diplomacy.

With over half of all Catholics in the developing world, some speculate the next pope will come from Africa, Asia or Latin America. Yet others believe the papacy could revert to Italy.

Historians say that another key factor in deciding the next pope may be the “pendulum dynamic,” the idea that the new pope may be very different from the old pope in order to build on the former pope’s strengths and remedy his weaknesses.

-- *Compiled by Annie Schleicher, NewsHour Extra*

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