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Vatican newsflash: Pope to name six new cardinals

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During a Synod of Bishops that has been somewhat short of banner headlines, Pope Benedict XVI made some news today, announcing a consistory for the creation of six new cardinals Nov. 24.

One veteran American made the cut, as did a couple of prelates from the developing world considered possible papal contenders in some circles.

The new cardinals are:

- James Harvey, American, the longtime head of the Papal Household under John Paul II and Benedict XVI. The pope said he intends to nominate as Archpriest of the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls.
- His Beatitude Bechara Boutros Raï, patriarch of the Maronite Church in Lebanon.
- His Beatitude Baselios Cleemis Thottunkal, head of the Syro-Mankar Church in India.
- Archbishop John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan of Abuja, Nigeria, long considered one of the leading voices of Catholicism in Africa.
- Archbishop Rubén Salazar Gómez of Bogota, Colombia.
- Archbishop Luis Antonio Tagle of Manila in the Philippines, considered one of the brightest theological minds among the Asia bishops and also one of their best communicators.

Tagle, 55, and Onayiekan, 68, both could draw consideration as possible successors to Benedict XVI if the mood at the time of the next conclave is to look for leadership to the booming church in the global south.

Tagle has turned heads during the current Synod of Bishops on new evangelization for his emphasis on a humbler, simpler church with a greater capacity for silence while Onayiekan has won praise for his balanced view on Islam -- insisting that despite the violence of the "Boko Haram" movement, "Christians in Nigeria do not see themselves as being under any massive persecution by Muslims."

Harvey, 63, a Milwaukee native, has served as prefect of the Papal Household since 1988. There was some speculation that when his Vatican service ended he might return to the States to head an American diocese, though today's announcement suggests he'll be staying in Rome, at least for the time being.

In a papacy often accused of being fairly Eurocentric, it's also notable that none of these new cardinals is a European and only one, Harvey, comes from the West. One is from Latin America; one from the Middle East; one from Africa; and two from Asia.

The unusually small number in this consistory reflects the fact that Benedict XVI is determined to stick to the rule established under Paul VI of having no more than 120 cardinals under the age of 80 and thus eligible to vote for the next pope. At the moment there are 116, and two more will age out Nov. 1 and Nov. 23, thereby creating exactly six spaces.

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