NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

What happens during the interregnum?

Thomas Reese | Mar. 4, 2013 NCR Today
Conclave 2013

The interregnum and election of a new pope are governed by the rules established in the 1996 constitution *Universi Dominici Gregis* *[1]* ("Of the Lord's Whole Flock") of John Paul II, as modified by Benedict in 2007 [2] and 2013 [3].

The camerlengo (Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone) locks and seals the private apartment of the pope. In the past, looting of papal apartments by his staff, the cardinals or the Roman populace was a common custom. Modern popes have been more concerned that their private papers not fall into the wrong hands. Benedict, of course, took his private papers with him. The pope's fisherman's ring and his seal are broken to symbolize the end of his reign and to prevent forgeries, which sometimes happened in the past.

All the cardinals and archbishops in charge of departments in the Roman Curia, including the secretary of state (Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone), lose their jobs when the pope resigns or dies. The ordinary faculties of these offices, which are run by their secretaries during the interregnum, do not cease on the death of the pope, but serious and controversial matters are to await the election of a new pope. The secretaries remain in position, as do the secretary for relations with states (Archbishop Dominique Mamberti) and the sostituto (Archbishop Giovanni Angelo Becciu). If the matter cannot be postponed, the College of Cardinals can entrust it to the prefect or president who was in charge of the office when the pope died (or to other cardinals who were members of that congregation or council). Any decision made is provisional until confirmed by the new pope.

Three major officials do not lose their jobs: the vicar of the diocese of Rome (Cardinal Agostino Vallini), the major penitentiary (Cardinal Manuel Monteiro de Castro) and the camerlengo (Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone). The vicar for Rome provides for the pastoral needs of the diocese of Rome and continues to have all the powers he had under the deceased pope. The major penitentiary deals with confessional matters reserved to the Holy See, and he is allowed to continue functioning because the door to forgiveness should never be closed. He is the only one who can communicate with his office on penitentiary business during the conclave.

The camerlengo is the most important official during the interregnum. While the pope is alive, he has the authority to act for the pope in certain areas when the pope is away from Rome. On the resignation or death of the pope, the camerlengo takes charge of and administers the property and money of the Holy See, with the help of three cardinal assistants chosen by lot from among those cardinals under 80. During the interregnum, he reports to the College of Cardinals, which governs the church until a pope is elected. He also organizes the conclave. By appointing the cardinal secretary of state as the camerlengo, Benedict simplified the organizational structure and made sure that his secretary of state had an important role during the interregnum.

Although the government of the church is in the hands of the College of Cardinals until a new pope is elected, the powers of the college are limited. It cannot change the rules governing papal elections, appoint cardinals or make any decisions binding on the next pope. The cardinals meet daily in a general congregation, presided over by the dean of the college (Cardinal Angelo Sodano), until the conclave begins. All the cardinals attend the general congregation, though attendance by those over 80 is optional. A commission headed by the camerlengo

with three cardinals (chosen by lot and replaced every three days from among the cardinals under 80) can deal with lesser issues. The first meeting of the general congregation was on Monday.

Follow Reese on Twitter: @ThomasReeseSJ [4]. His email is treesesj@NCRonline.org [5].

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