Vatican
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Newly created Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe, a Dominican theologian, is congratulated by other

Newly created Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe, a Dominican theologian, is congratulated by other members of the College of Cardinals after receiving his red hat from Pope Francis at a consistory Dec. 7 in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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***Editor's note**: This story has been updated to include details about Pope Francis' Dec. 6 fall.*

Pope Francis wasn't the only man wearing white during the Dec. 7 Vatican ceremony when he created 21 new cardinals.

Among those churchmen elevated to the Catholic Church's most elite body that will elect the next pope, two had opted to forgo the traditional scarlet vestments and to continue to wear their simple white religious habits.

It was a fitting response considering the marching orders the pope offered here at the Vatican to the men who are now tasked with serving as his closest collaborators.

"You will be a radiant sign in the midst of a society obsessed with appearances and power," the pope said.

"Our hearts can go astray, allowing us to be dazzled by the allure of prestige, the seduction of power," he warned the men, often referred to as "princes of the church."

At today's Vatican ceremony, the pope's chin and neck appeared bruised. The Vatican later clarified that the injuries occurred when the pontiff fell on Dec. 6 and hit his chin on his bedside table.

> 'The Lord is looking to you, who come from different backgrounds and cultures, and represent the catholicity of the Church. He is calling you to be witnesses of fraternity, artisans of communion and builders of unity.'
> —Pope Francis
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Francis announced on Oct. 6 that he would again create new cardinals. The pope, who has repeatedly called on church leaders to adopt lifestyles of simplicity and humility, doubled down on that message during the Dec. 7 Vatican ceremony, known as a consistory.

He has now named 110 of the 140 cardinals who are under age 80 and eligible to participate in a future papal conclave. Twenty-four of the remaining voting age cardinals were named by Pope Benedict XVI and 6 by Pope John Paul II.

Similar to past cohorts, the group of 21 new cardinals reflects the pope's desire to expand the geographic diversity of the College of Cardinals. To date, Francis has given the cardinal's red hat to clergy from nearly 30 countries that had previously never before been represented in the select body.

Among the new cardinals, 10 hail from religious orders, including the two Dominicans — Archbishop Jean-Paul Vesco of Algiers and British Fr. Timothy Radcliffe — who received special permission from the pope to continue to wear their white habits rather than the more ornate cardinatial regalia.

During the Vatican ceremony, where the cardinals received gold rings and silk red birettas — the pope warned his new advisers that they should beware of the "corrosive competition of this world."

Their task, the pontiff insisted, is to "walk in the path of Jesus" by promoting unity in the church.

“The Lord is looking to you, who come from different backgrounds and cultures, and represent the catholicity of the Church," Francis said. "He is calling you to be witnesses of fraternity, artisans of communion and builders of unity."

Cardinal Angelo Acerbi, a former Vatican diplomat, thanks Pope Francis on behalf of himself a

Cardinal Angelo Acerbi, a former Vatican diplomat, thanks Pope Francis on behalf of himself and the 20 other new cardinals created during a consistory Dec. 7 in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. At 99, Acerbi is ineligible to participate in a papal conclave. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Today's consistory of new cardinals comes at a delicate time: Francis is just 10 days shy of 88th birthday. Despite some underlying health challenges and regular use of a wheelchair, the pope continues to operate at an energetic pace.

But as one of the oldest popes in the Catholic Church's two-millenia history, the reality that these men could one day soon be sitting in the Sistine Chapel to elect the next pope was unmissable at the Vatican's festivities.

While many of the new cardinals — like others Francis has elevated — are relatively unknown, others have notable profiles of sharing the pope's pastoral priorities, particularly when it comes to ministering to those on the margins of the church. Among them:

- Archbishop Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi of Tokyo, Japan, is the current head of CARITAS, the church's global charitable arm;
- Archbishop Roberto Repole of Turin, Italy, is a theologian whose work has emphasized the need for the church to be open to the modern world;
- Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, the former head of the global Dominican Order, served as the pope's preacher during the 2023 and 2024 synods on synodality;
- Vesco, the 62-year-old Dominican archbishop of Algiers, is well-known for his pastoral outreach to divorced and remarried Catholics and engaging in

interreligious dialogue.

In an interview ahead of the consistory, Vesco made clear that his elevation would not alter his behavior.

"As a cardinal, I will remain free to speak my mind," Vesco told the French Catholic daily, La Croix.

The Dec. 7 ceremony marks the 10th time Francis has created new cardinals during his 12-year papacy. By contrast, Pope John Paul II held nine consistories over a span of nearly three decades. As of today, Francis has named nearly 80% of the men who will one day choose his successor

Christopher Bellitto, a historian who has written on the history of the papacy, told the National Catholic Reporter that the frequency of Francis' consistories indicates a desire to remake the college to better reflect a more global church.

"He wants voices from the peripheries to have a seat at the big table in the center, yes, but also to bring their concerns to the broader conversations, as occurred at the synod," said Bellitto.

"As for putting people who think like him in the college, which critics claim is stacking the deck: That charge is ridiculous," Bellitto continued. "All popes — and presidents and prime ministers and principals — choose like-minded advisers. Francis' critics didn't seem to mind when John Paul II and Benedict XVI did the exact same thing."

Here is the full list of the 21 new cardinals:

- Carlos Gustavo Castillo Mattasoglio of Lima, Peru;
- Vicente Bokalic Iglic, archbishop of Santiago Del Estero (primate of Argentina);
- Luis Gerardo Cabrera Herrera, archbishop of Guayaquil, Ecuador;
- Fernando Natalio Chomalí Garib, archbishop of Santiago De Chile, Chile;
- Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi of Tokyo, Japan;
- Pablo Virgilio Siongco David of Kalookan, Philippines;
- Ladislav Nemet of Belgrade; Serbia;
- Jaime Spengler of Porto Alegre, Brazil;
- Ignace Bessi Dogbo of Abidjan, Ivory Coast;
- Jean-Paul Vesco of Algiers, Algeria;
- Dominique Joseph Mathieu of Tehran Ispahan, Iran;

- Roberto Repole of Turin, Italy;
- Baldassare Reina, auxiliary bishop of Rome and vicar general for the Diocese Of Rome;
- Francis Leo of Toronto, Canada;
- Rolandas Makrickas, coadjutor archpriest of the Papal Basilica of Saint Mary Major;
- Mykola Bychok of the Ukrainian Eparchy Saints Peter and Paul of Melbourne, Australia;
- Timothy Peter Joseph Radcliffe, former master of the Dominican Order;
- Fabio Baggio, under-secretary of the Migrants and Refugees section of the Dicastery For Promoting Integral Human Development;
- George Jacob Koovakad, official of the Vatican's Secretary of State, responsible for travel; and
- Domenico Battaglia, archbishop of Naples, Italy.
- Angelo Acerbi, retired apostolic nuncio (At 99, Acerbi is no longer eligible to participate in a papal conclave).

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