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Stoves used to burn ballots during a papal conclave are seen in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel March 8, 2013. (CNS/L'Osservatore Romano)

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Vatican City — April 30, 2025
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One by one, placing a right hand on the Book of Gospels, staff driving, cooking, cleaning and caring for the cardinals who will elect a new pope will swear an oath of perpetual secrecy about the election of the 266th successor of St. Peter.

While members of the College of Cardinals famously take an oath, so do Vatican staff members, including the elevator operator, doctors and attendants, who will be assisting with the everyday tasks and needs of the cardinals during the conclave which begins May 7.

In an April 29 statement, the Vatican said "the oath of the officials and attendants of the conclave will take place" May 5 in the Pauline Chapel, not far from the Sistine Chapel where the cardinals will vote for the next pope.

The Vatican also announced that the Mass for the Election of the Roman Pontiff will begin at 10 a.m. in St. Peter's Basilica May 7 and that the cardinals will solemnly process into the Sistine Chapel from the Pauline Chapel at 4:30 p.m. the same day.

Among those directly assisting the College of Cardinals and are required to swear the oath are: Archbishop Ilson Montanari, secretary of the College of Cardinals; Archbishop Diego Ravelli, master of the liturgical ceremonies; and a priest chosen by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, who is presiding over the conclave, "to assist him in his office."

Also taking the oath are sacristans, priests who will be available to hear the cardinals' confessions, doctors, nurses, elevator operators, technical services staff, the colonel and major of the Pontifical Swiss Guard, as well as the director of security services for Vatican City State and some of his assistants.

The rules regarding the oath were outlined in the apostolic constitution, "Universi Dominici Gregis" ("Shepherd of the Lord's Whole Flock"), which was issued by St. John Paul II in 1996 and amended by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 and again in 2013.

According to the apostolic constitution, the cardinal chamberlain, currently Cardinal Kevin Farrell, along with three cardinal assistants, will approve the staff members chosen to have contact with the cardinals during the conclave and, therefore, required to take the oath.

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At the fifth general congregation meeting April 28, it was announced that Cardinals Luis Antonio Tagle, Dominique Mamberti, and Reinhard Marx were chosen to assist Cardinal Farrell in preparing for the conclave.

Once approved, the staff members "who in any way or at any time should come to learn anything from any source, directly or indirectly, regarding the election process, and in particular regarding the voting which took place in the election itself, are obliged to maintain strict secrecy with all persons extraneous to the College of Cardinal electors," the document states.

Placing their hands on the Gospels, staff members swear to "observe absolute and perpetual secrecy with all who are not part of the College of Cardinal electors concerning all matters directly or indirectly related to the ballots cast and their scrutiny for the election of the Supreme Pontiff."

Staff will also swear not to use audio or video equipment to record anything taking place during the period of the election or that is related to the process of the election itself.

"I declare that I take this oath fully aware that an infraction thereof will incur the penalty of automatic ('latae sententiae') excommunication reserved to the Apostolic See," the document states.

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