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

# Maronite bishops prepare to elect new patriarch

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**BEIRUT** -- Maronite Catholic bishops from around the world will gather beginning March 9 for a synod to elect the 77th patriarch of the Maronite Catholic Church in Bkerke, Lebanon, the patriarchal seat of the Maronites.

Pope Benedict XVI officially accepted the resignation of Cardinal Nasrallah P. Sfeir Feb. 26. The still-energetic cardinal, 90, resigned because of his age.

The Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches says the election of a new patriarch must be completed within two months of a vacancy.

The synod will be presided over by the longest-serving Maronite bishop, in this case Bishop Roland Aboujaoude, patriarchal administrator. The synod has 41 members, including the patriarch.

Four rounds of elections will take place on a daily basis over a 15-day period.

A quorum of two-thirds of the attending bishops is needed for a new patriarch to be elected.

A statement from patriarchal headquarters said two bishops will miss the synod because of illness: retired Bishops John Chedid of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles and Stephen Doueihi of St. Maron of Brooklyn.

If the synod fails to elect a patriarch after 15 days, the issue is put before the Vatican and the pope must make a decision. If a bishop is elected, the synod declares him patriarch and the Vatican is informed by the new patriarch formally requesting to enter into communion with the pope.

**Source URL (retrieved on *04/24/2017 - 01:26*):** https://www.ncronline.org/news/maronite-bishops-prepare-elect-new-patriarch