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Conclave to silence at least nine tweeting cardinals

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

Vatican City — Parrots may squawk in the Vatican Gardens during a conclave, but the cardinals are not allowed to tweet.

For most of the 117 red-vested princes of the church who are eligible to vote for a new pope, Twitter isn't an issue at all. But the College of Cardinals does include at least nine active tweeters. From the moment they enter the Sistine Chapel to cast their ballots, they will be forbidden access to their accounts along with all other forms of communication with the outside world.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York (@CardinalDolan) informed his almost 80,000 Twitter followers when Pope Benedict XVI announced his resignation Monday.

As of Friday, Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston (@CardinalSean) had not mentioned the pope's resignation on his Twitter feed. In fact, the last tweet to his more than 9,200 followers was posted two days before the pope's announcement.

After the pope's announcement, Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi (@CardRavasi), president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, almost immediately tweeted a traditional prayer in Latin: "Sub tuum praesidium confugimus, sancta Dei Genetrix" ("Under thy protection we seek refuge, O Holy Mother of God").

The Italian cardinal, often mentioned on pundits' lists of possible popes, has more than 35,400 followers and tweets frequently.

Brazilian Cardinal Odilo Scherer of Sao Paulo (@DomOdiloScherer) is not a daily tweeter. But on Thursday, he used Twitter, with its 140-character maximum for messages, to comment, "I am impressed with the interpretations I have read of the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI."

The cardinal has more than 22,700 Twitter followers.

Italian Cardinal Angelo Scola of Milan (@angeloscola), another cardinal appearing on many pope-watch lists, had not commented on the pope's resignation to his almost 16,800 followers as of Friday.

South African Cardinal Wilfrid Napier of Durban (@CardinalNapier) has thanked his almost 3,100 Twitter followers for their promise of prayers. "Keep praying for a truly Christ-like leader," he messaged them.

Spanish Cardinal Lluís Martínez Sistach of Barcelona (@sistachcardenal) told his 2,300 followers that he thanked the pope "for all he's done for the church and the world."

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The cardinal also told them that the pope's resignation "is an expression of his deep spirituality and great love for the church."

Like Dolan, Colombian Cardinal Ruben Salazar Gomez of Bogota (@cardenalruben) follows only Pope Benedict (@Pontifex). He used his account to say, "Holy Father, the Colombian church accompanies you with its prayer at (the time of) this honest and courageous decision."

He then asked his nearly 2,900 followers to offer their Lenten fasting for the pope and "the future of the church."

Cardinal Roger Mahony (@CardinalMahony), retired archbishop of Los Angeles, just started tweeting in January. He had more than 260 followers by Friday.

When the pope resigned, he tweeted: "Am planning to be in Rome and vote for the next pope. Will be tweeting daily."

And a few days later, he reassured his followers: "The Holy Spirit is in charge, not the media; we will be shown God's chosen one."

Two weeks before the pope made his announcement, the Italian Jesuit magazine *Popoli* and the media firm Oogo did a brief survey of eight of the cardinals' Twitter accounts.

Scola started tweeting in May 2009, it said. Ravasi, Scherer and Napier began in July 2011. O'Malley, Martínez Sistach and Dolan began in March 2012, and Salazar just launched his account in December.

The magazine also looked at the percentage of "retweets" or messages sent out by the cardinals to their followers, then re-launched to their followers' followers.

Scola scored lowest with a 40 percent retweet rate, while Dolan topped the list at 100 percent, which is the same retweet rate @Pontifex enjoys. The others have a retweet rate of between 82 percent and 90 percent, *Popoli* reported.

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