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A few fun facts about popes in history

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

Conclave 2013

Vatican City — When Pope Benedict XVI, 85, announced his resignation, he said "both strength of mind and body are necessary" to carry out the papal ministry in the modern world.

He was elected in 2005, just after his 78th birthday. Of the 102 popes whose exact age at election is known, Pope Benedict was one of 17 churchmen elected bishop of Rome while between the ages of 71 and 80.

Ambrogio Piazzoni, vice prefect of the Vatican Library and author of a book on the history of papal elections, distributed a sheet of "some curiosities" about elections to reporters Thursday, the day after briefing journalists at the Vatican.

On the topic of the age of the pope at election, he said:

- Three popes were under the age of 25. The last was Pope Gregory V, who was 24 when elected in 996.
- Seven were between 25 and 40 years old. The last was Pope Leo X, who was 37 in 1513.
- Eleven were between 41 and 50. The last was Pope Clement VII, who was elected in 1523 at the age of 44.
- 24 popes were in their 50s. The most recent was Blessed John Paul II, who was 58 years old when he began his papal ministry in 1978.
- 37 were between 61 and 70 years old. The last was Pope John Paul I, who was 65 when he began his 33-day papacy in 1978.
- Only three popes were over 80 when elected. The last, chosen by cardinals in 1406, was Pope Gregory XII. He was 81.

Piazzoni also provided a list of "lasts":

- The last pope who was not a cardinal yet when elected was Pope Urban VI in 1378.
- The last who was not even a priest yet was Pope Leo X.
- The last born in Rome was Pope Pius XII, elected in 1939. (He was also the last serving Vatican secretary of state elected.)
- The last African was Pope Gelasius, elected in 492.
- The last native of Dalmatia, an ancient Roman province, was Pope John IV in 640.
- The last Frenchman elected was Pope Gregory XI, in 1370.
- The last Greek was Pope Zachary in 741.
- The last Englishman was Pope Adrian IV in 1154.
- The last Italian was Pope John Paul I.
- The last Dutchman was Pope Adrian VI in 1522.
- The last Palestinian was Pope Theodore in 642.
- The last Pole was Pope John Paul II in 1978.
- The last Portuguese was Pope John XXI in 1276.
- The last Syrian was Pope Gregory III in 731.
- The last Spaniard was Pope Alexander VI in 1492.
- The last German was Pope Benedict XVI, elected in 2005. It had been 950 years since a German -- Pope Victor II -- had been elected.

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