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Indonesian cardinal says poor eyesight will keep him from conclave

by Catholic News Service

Conclave 2013

Vatican City — At least one of the 117 cardinals eligible to elect a new pope will not come to Rome because of illness.

Indonesian Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja, the 78-year-old retired archbishop of Jakarta, told the Rome-based AsiaNews agency Thursday that his health and particularly the "progressive deterioration" of his eyesight led to his decision not to travel to Rome.

The cardinal said he made the "free and personal" choice because not being able to see and not being able to bring an assistant into the conclave with him would impose a "serious obstacle" to participating in the cardinals' work.

The responsibility of electing a new pope requires serenity and autonomy, he said, as well as an ability to read texts and documents.

The cardinal spoke with AsiaNews by telephone from the Jesuit Emmaus House, a retirement home for priests and prelates in Ungaran, where he retired two years ago.

"I am convinced that I am no longer suitable and proper to sit with other cardinals to vote for the new pope. So I have decided not to go to Rome for that kind of important event in the history of the church," he said.

The cardinal also said he "fully understands" Pope Benedict XVI's decision to resign for health reasons.

"I experienced this firsthand when I was archbishop of Jakarta, and I decided to resign when I reached 75," he said.

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