

Vote for new pope set for Tuesday, no clear consensus

Joshua J. McElwee | Mar. 8, 2013

Conclave 2013

Rome

The cardinals of the Roman Catholic church will begin voting for the new leader of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics Tuesday, the Vatican has announced.

The decision to set the date for the vote, widely anticipated after five days of secret deliberations, came amid a reportedly unsure atmosphere among the cardinals.

Going into the final meetings, there was reportedly a lack of clear consensus among the cardinals on who the leading candidates are for the next pontiff.

Friday's decision to set the date of the secret vote for the next pope, known as the conclave, came at the cardinals' eighth meeting since the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI Feb. 28. They have been meeting daily, sometimes twice daily, since Monday.

"The eighth General Congregation of the College of Cardinals has decided that the Conclave will begin on Tuesday, 12 March 2013," the Vatican said in a release.

The cardinals are expected to celebrate a formal Mass for the election of a new pope in St. Peter's Basilica Tuesday morning. They will then enter the Sistine Chapel Tuesday afternoon for the first round of balloting.

If, as expected, no pope emerges on that ballot, the cardinals will continue voting on subsequent days, with two rounds of balloting each morning and evening.

If by the third day they do not reach the two-thirds majority required for the election of a new pontiff -- 77 of the 115 voting -- voting is halted for a day of prayer.

Before entering the conclave Tuesday, the cardinals are expected to continue meeting in their general congregation Saturday and Monday.

Through Friday, it has been widely reported that those meetings have been largely unfocused, with little general agreement about what is required in the next pope.

While conclaves are normally not allowed to occur until 15 days after a pope has resigned or died -- in this case, next Friday -- Pope Benedict changed the church law on the matter in one of his last acts as pontiff.

That move touched off speculation that some cardinals, particularly those who had administrative roles in Benedict's papacy, would want an earlier date for the conclave, while others would want to delay it. The speculation centered on whether a quick vote would favor cardinals already familiar with the ins and outs of Vatican governance.

Among cardinals who had expressed a desire to delay the vote were several of the 11 Americans expected to take part.

"I know we're all looking to the desire to finish up before Holy Week, but I think we need to give it as much time as it needs," Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley, one of the 11, [told NCR](#) [1] March 3.

153 cardinals are now in Rome for the meetings, the Vatican said Friday morning, including all 115 of those expected to vote for the next pope.

All cardinals under the age of 80, numbering 117, are eligible to vote. Two have indicated they will not, including Scottish Cardinal Keith O'Brien after allegations by several priests and a former priest surfaced accusing him of improper sexual conduct. Another, Indonesia's Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja of Jakarta has declined to attend for health reasons.

More than 100 cardinals have spoken during time-slots provided at the daily meetings, Basilian Fr. Thomas Rosica, a Canadian who has been providing English translation at Vatican briefings, said Friday morning. The meetings are secret and the cardinals are sworn to an oath of secrecy.

Wide attention has been paid to any indications about what the cardinals have said during those meetings as an indication of what they may be looking for in the next pope.

While the Vatican briefings have explained the subjects of conversation in broad terms -- interreligious dialog, ecumenism, collegiality, "a positive proclamation of love and mercy" -- reports in Italian papers have indicated the cardinals have spoken at length about last year's leak of Vatican documents and the subsequent trial of the papal valet.

After a series of popular press briefings by U.S. cardinals taking part in the meetings was canceled in order to stem leaks about the conversations, focus shifted to whether there had been disagreements over the matter between the cardinals of the different nations.

Asked pointedly at [Thursday's Vatican briefing](#) [2] "why Americans were doing penance for the Italian cardinals," Rosica said it was "not up to" the Vatican spokesmen to settle potential disputes between national conferences.

Once the conclave opens Tuesday, the cardinals will be moved to a special Vatican hotel and will be kept to an even stricter code of secrecy.

Voting will take place in the Sistine Chapel, which has been specially retrofitted for the purpose with a more age-friendly elevated floor, electronic jamming technology, and two furnaces to burn the cardinals' votes after each ballot.

Recent elections have seen a development towards shorting voting times. In 2005, when Pope Benedict was elected, the election took less than 24 hours.

The longest conclave took nearly three years, when cardinals voting for the successor to Pope Clement IV met from November 1268 until September 1271.

[Joshua J. McElwee is an *NCR* staff writer. His email address is jmcelwee@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter at twitter.com/joshjmac [3]. *NCR* senior correspondent John L. Allen Jr. contributed to this report.]

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