

Where does the word 'conclave' come from?

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Conclave 2013

In the 13th century the papacy was vacant for a year and a half before the election of Innocent IV and for three and a half years before the installation of Gregory X. In the first case the election was finally forced by the senate and people of Rome, who locked up the cardinals until a pope was chosen in 1243. In the second case, the people of Viterbo in 1271 not only locked the cardinals in, but tore off the roof of the building and put the cardinals on a diet of bread and water. The word 'conclave' comes from the Latin, 'with a key,' as in locked with a key.

Today the cardinals are locked in to ensure secrecy and to protect them from outside influence. Before the conclave begins, all telephones, cell phones, radios, televisions and Internet connections are removed. No letters or newspapers are permitted. All the rooms are swept for electronic bugs by trained technicians. During the 2005 conclave, two reporters were told by a Swiss Guard that the floor of the Sistine Chapel was raised to make room for electronic jamming equipment. The Vatican spokesman denies this.

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