

FORMALITIES FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF A POPE

THE INTERREGNUM

The Camerlengo (Papal chamberlain, currently Cardinal Kevin Farrell) ceremonially verifies the Pope's death and authorises a death certificate.

The event is made public by notifying the Cardinal Vicar for the Diocese of Rome (currently Cardinal Baldassare Reina), who then notifies the city of Rome and the world. Although this is the formal procedure, and the Pope is not declared dead until the Camerlengo takes this action, we will likely hear confirmation of the Pope's death through the media before the formalities.

The Dean of the College of Cardinals (currently Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re) will then officially notify the other cardinals of the world and call all those under the age of eighty to Rome for the Conclave. He also notifies the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, and the Heads of State of various nations.

The Pope's body is brought to the Sistine Chapel for the Cardinals and the Papal Household to venerate privately. After that, the body is brought to St. Peter's Basilica, where it will lie in state for the faithful to pay their respects.

The Australian Head of State will be informed of the death of the Pope through the Dean of the College of Cardinals.

THE FUNERAL

The Camerlengo and the College of Cardinals then prepare for the funeral, to be held within four to six days of the Pope's death. The principal celebrant for the funeral is always the Dean of the College of Cardinals. The deceased Pope is then buried in the crypt below St Peter's Basilica. *(In a 2023 interview, Pope Francis mentioned he wanted his final resting place to be Santa Maria Maggiore basilica, which would make him the first Pope since Clement IX 1669 to be buried there and the first since Leo XIII in 1903 to be buried outside the Vatican.)*

NOVENDIALES

Before the Conclave can start, there is a period called Novendiales, a nine-day mourning period before the process of electing a new Pope begins. During this time, celebrants worldwide will celebrate Mass for the deceased Pope.

THE CONCLAVE

Unless circumstances prevent it, the Conclave occurs inside Vatican City and begins 15 days after the Pope's death. The College of Cardinals meet within the Sistine Chapel to choose his successor from among their number by secret ballot. The votes of at least two-thirds of the eligible cardinals present plus one are required for a candidate to be named Pope.

On the first day of the Conclave, only one ballot is permitted. On the other days of the Conclave, two ballots are permitted in the morning and two in the afternoon.

In the case of difficulty electing, when there are three days of voting without an election, voting is suspended for one full day for a day of prayer and discussion. Voting is then resumed in a pattern of another seven ballots before another suspension of voting until a new pope is elected. With each unsuccessful vote, the cardinals release black smoke through a chimney visible from Saint Peter's Basilica.

(The latest figures show there are 135 voting-age cardinals, including our own Cardinal Mykola Bychok who is the youngest cardinal.)

ANNOUNCEMENT

When the College of Cardinals has elected a new pope, white smoke is released to announce that a new pope has been chosen.

The newly elected Pope accepts and gets ready to greet the world on the famous balcony of St. Peter's Basilica. The senior Cardinal Deacon or Cardinal Protodeacon (currently Cardinal Dominique Mamberti) appears first on the balcony to declare 'Habemus Papam' (We have a Pope). The newly elected Pope then addresses and blesses the City and the World.

*Article courtesy of Paul Osborne, Media & Communications Director,
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*