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How A New Pope is Chosen in the 21st Century

Here's a brief outline of how it's done:

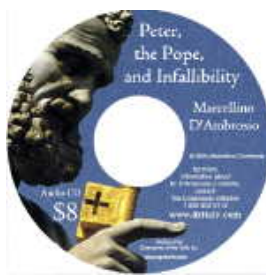
- The Lord Jesus himself established the basic and unchanging roles of leadership in his church when he selected twelve of his disciples as apostles and, from their number, chose one whose name was changed from Simon to Peter, meaning rock. The successors of the apostles are called bishops. Peter died in Rome, so the bishop of Rome is the Successor of Peter. "Pope" is simply the English translation of "Papa" or Father.
- The process of the selection of the next successor of Peter is not something that Jesus himself established. It has changed over the centuries and is a matter of Church regulations, called "Canon Law." The reigning Pope can and regularly does alter Canon Law.
- According to Canon Law as it stands in 2005, it is the role of the head of the Sacred College of Cardinals (called the Chamberlain or Camerlengo), who officially verifies the death of the Pope. Standing over the body of the Holy Father, he calls the Pope by his baptismal name three times. Upon receiving no response, he announces the death and orders that the Fisherman's ring and the papal seal, both inscribed with the name of the reigning pope, to be broken. Later, another ring and seal will be made for the newly elected pope. The Camerlengo then prepares for the Pope's burial and the traditional nine days of mourning. Assisted by three officials elected from the college, he directs the election of the pontiff's successor.
- Fifteen to 20 days after the death of the Pope, the College of Cardinals meets for the election. Though they reside all over the world, the Cardinals are the clergy (priests and bishops) who are personally selected by the Pope to serve as the key advisors and Papal electors. Though they hold the office of Cardinal for life, only Cardinals under the age of 80 are eligible to vote in a Papal election. As of April, 2005, there are 123 voting cardinals.



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- After a Mass of the Holy Spirit in St. Peter's Basilica, the cardinals enter a guarded annex of the Sistine Chapel for the election process, and are isolated from the rest of the world until the election process is completed. This election is the original "lock-in" and is thus known as a "conclave" meaning locked in "with key." Each cardinal swears an oath to protect the secrecy of the election. Breaking the oath carries a penalty of immediate excommunication. The Cardinal's Vatican City residence during the conclave is St. Martha hall. Both this residence/dining hall and the Sistine chapel are screened for bugging devices. The cardinals are therefore truly sequestered from any contact with the outside world until the election is completed. Entrances are sealed and curtains closed.
- On the first morning of the conclave, the cardinals celebrate a Mass of the Holy Spirit in the Sistine Chapel asking for divine guidance in the selection of a new Pope. Then the electoral session begins.
- The election is conducted in secret written ballots counted by the Camerlengo and his three assistants. In the past, a pope needed two thirds of the vote plus one to be elected. In 1996, however, Pope John Paul II changed this rule so that if the votes continue to be unsuccessful for 12 or 13 days, the cardinals may select the new Pope by absolute majority (half plus one).
- Two ballots are taken each morning and two each afternoon until a successful vote is completed. After each voting session, ballots are burned. If the vote is inconclusive, a chemical substance is added to the paper to produce black smoke. Billowing from the roof of the Vatican Palace, the smoke is a message to the crowds watching in St. Peter's Square that the church is still without a pope.
- When the college eventually reaches the final decision, each cardinal lowers a purple canopy over his chair, leaving the elected Pope's canopy folded. The final ballots are burned and their white smoke signals a successful election. The dean of the cardinals asks if the chosen member accepts the papacy. Upon accepting, the new pontiff is made bishop of Rome and is honored by each of the cardinals.
- The dean then steps out onto the balcony of the Vatican, shouting "Habemus papam!" ("We have a Pope!") The new pontiff, clothed in Papal vestments, then appears to greet and bless the waiting world.

Peter, the Pope and Infallibility



As we as a Catholic community mourn the death of [Pope John Paul II](#), there are questions raised by Catholics and Non-Catholics about the [Papacy](#) and its institution. [Peter, the Pope and Infallibility](#) by Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio will help answer many of the questions that people may ask during this time of mourning. This CD (or AT) is 45 minutes in length and was given during Dr. D'Ambrosio pilgrimage to Rome.

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