

# The Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church

- **Introduction**
- **Consistory**
- **College of Cardinals**
- **Canon Law**

## Introduction

Following his general audience in St Peter's Square on 17 October 2007, the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, announced the names of 23 prelates to be created cardinals in a consistory to be held on 24 November 2007, the eve of the Feast of Christ the King. As part of this announcement Pope Benedict included the name of Archbishop Seán Brady, the Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland. The consistory will be the second of his pontificate.

Following the 24 November consistory, the College of Cardinals will number 202 members of whom 121, under the age of 80, will be electors.

## Consistory

The Consistory for the creation of new Cardinals, according to the new rite introduced during the Consistory of 28 June 1991 contains the following points:

- Following a liturgical greeting, the Pope reads the formula of creation, and solemnly proclaims the names of the new cardinals.
- The first of the new cardinals then addresses the Holy Father, on behalf of everyone.
- This is followed by the Liturgy of the Word, the Pope's homily, the Profession of Faith and the taking of the oath by each cardinal.
- Each new cardinal then approaches the Holy Father and kneels before him to receive the cardinal's berretta and to be assigned a title or deaconry.
- The Pope places the berretta on his head and says, in part: "*(This is) red as a sign of the dignity of the office of a cardinal, signifying that you are ready to act with fortitude, even to the point of spilling your blood for the increase of the Christian faith, for peace and harmony among the people of God, for freedom and the spread of the Holy Roman Catholic Church*"
- The new cardinals are assigned a church of Rome ("Title" or "Deaconry"), as a sign of their participation in the pastoral care of the Pope for the City.
- The Holy Father hands over the Bull of the Creation of Cardinals, assigns the Title or Deaconry and exchanges a kiss of peace with the new members of the College of Cardinals.
- The cardinals also exchange such a sign among themselves.
- The rite is concluded with the Prayer of the Faithful, the recitation of the Our Father and the final blessing.

During the *Cappella Papale* the Holy Father will preside at the concelebration of Mass with the new Cardinals, and after the homily will give each of them the Cardinal's ring “*the sign of dignity, pastoral care and the most solid communion with the See of Peter*”.

### **College of Cardinals**

Among the College of Bishops, it has been a longstanding tradition of the Church, to raise certain bishops and archbishops to the College of Cardinals. The Cardinals have traditionally been seen as the “Princes of the Church”. Because of their special devotion and holiness, they are called to assist the Holy Father in the governance of the Church.

Most Cardinals are either Archbishops of the largest dioceses in their countries or regions, or the heads of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia (the Pope's Ministers of State).

Of course, the singular role that the Cardinals play is that of electing a new Pontiff when the See of Peter is vacant. To them belongs this honour and responsibility.

Because the Cardinals are called to help the Pope in his leadership of the Church, they are also linked in a special way to the Diocese of Rome. A small number of Cardinals are made the titular bishops (ie, in name only) of the suburbicarian Sees surrounding Rome.

In addition, each of the remaining Cardinals is given the honorary "governance" of one of the Parish Churches of Rome. Whenever they visit Rome, they are encouraged to minister to their community in Rome. Strictly speaking, it is the Cardinal who is the "parish priest" of these parishes, not the priest who fulfils that role in reality. However, in real terms, the Cardinal's position in that church is only titular.

There are three degrees within the College of Cardinals:  
Cardinal Bishops;  
Cardinal Priests; and,  
Cardinal Deacons.

This does not correspond to their actual degree of orders (ie, whether they are a bishop, priest or deacon) but to their position within the College of Cardinals. Cardinals appointed from dioceses around the world are made Cardinal Priests. Cardinals appointed from within the Roman Curia are made Cardinal Deacons. However, after having been a Cardinal Deacon for 10 years, the Cardinal can petition the Pope to be promoted to Cardinal Priest. The distinction between the three degrees of Cardinals has little practical significance except in determining the order and rank for ceremonial processions. Also, during the period after a Pope dies and before a new one is elected, it is one's position within the College of Cardinals that determines one's power to exercise certain powers if the Dean of the College of Cardinals or Camerlengo are unable to do so.

On 21 October 2003 the late Pope John Paul II created 31 new cardinals, including one that he had been reserving "in pectore" from a previous Consistory. This means that they

were appointed, but only he knew who they were usually to protect the cardinal in question where they find themselves living in a situation of persecution.

That was Pope John Paul's ninth ordinary public consistory for the naming of cardinals. In the previous six consistories, he created 137 cardinals. The previous consistories were held on: June 30, 1979 (15 cardinals, of whom one was "in pectore"); February 2, 1983 (18); May 25, 1985 (28); June 28, 1988 (24: he had named 25 but theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar died on June 26); June 28, 1991 (22); November 26, 1994 (30); 18 February 1998 (20) and 21 February 2001 (44).

Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Constitution "Romano Pontifici Eligendo," promulgated on October 1, 1975, established numerical limits for the College of Cardinals. It stated that cardinals who had reached the age of 80 could not enter into conclave, and that the number of electors could not go beyond 120. Pope John Paul II continued this limitation when he revoked "Romano Pontifici Eligendo" and introduced a new revised set of rules for papal elections in "Universi Dominici Gregis" in 1996. However, in the 2001 Consistory and again in 2003, the Holy Father ignored the limit he had set and appointed a large number of Cardinals, taking the number of Cardinals under 80 (and therefore eligible to vote) to 137.

**From the Code of Canon Law (published in 1983):**

Can. 349 The Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church constitute a special College, whose prerogative it is to elect the Roman Pontiff in accordance with the norms of a special law. The Cardinals are also available to the Roman Pontiff, either acting collegially, when they are summoned together to deal with questions of major importance, or acting individually, that is, in the offices which they hold in assisting the Roman Pontiff especially in the daily care of the universal Church.

Can. 350 §1. The College of Cardinals is divided into three orders: the episcopal order, to which belong those Cardinals to whom the Roman Pontiff assigns the title of a suburbicarian Church, and eastern-rite Patriarchs who are made members of the College of Cardinals; the presbyteral order, and the diaconal order.

Can. 351 §1. Those to be promoted Cardinals are men freely selected by the Roman Pontiff, who are at least in the order of the priesthood and are truly outstanding for doctrine, virtue, piety and prudence in practical matters; those who are not already Bishops must receive episcopal consecration.

§2. Cardinals are created by a decree of the Roman Pontiff, which in fact is published in the presence of the College of Cardinals. From the moment of publication, they are bound by the obligations and they enjoy these rights defined in the law.

Can. 353 §1. Cardinals assist the Supreme Pastor of the Church in collegial fashion particularly in Consistories, in which they are gathered by order of the Roman Pontiff and under his presidency. Consistories are either ordinary or extraordinary.

Can. 356 Cardinals have the obligation of cooperating closely with the Roman Pontiff. For this reason, Cardinals who have any office in the Curia and are not diocesan Bishops, are obliged to reside in Rome. Cardinals who are in charge of a diocese as diocesan Bishops, are to come to Rome whenever summoned by the Roman Pontiff.

Can. 357 §1. When a Cardinal has taken possession of a suburbicarian Church or of a titular Church in Rome, he is to further the good of the diocese or church by counsel and patronage. However, he has no power of governance over it, and he should not for any reason interfere in matters concerning the administration of its good, or its discipline, or the service of the church.

§2. Cardinals living outside Rome and outside their own diocese, are exempt in what concerns their person from the power of governance of the Bishop of the diocese in which they are residing.

Can. 358 A Cardinal may be deputed by the Roman Pontiff to represent him in some solemn celebration or assembly of persons as a *Legatus a latere*, that is, as his *alter ego*; or he may, as a *special emissary*, be entrusted with a particular pastoral task. A Cardinal thus nominated is entitled to deal only with those affairs which have been entrusted to him by the Roman Pontiff himself.

Can. 359 When the Apostolic See is vacant, the College of Cardinals has only that power in the Church which is granted to it by special law.