**Beat: Miscellaneous**

# Conclave to elect new pope to start on March 12

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**USPA News -** Roman Catholic cardinals who have gathered at the Vatican have decided to start their conclave to elect a new pope on Tuesday afternoon following a morning mass, the Vatican said on Friday. It follows the unexpected resignation of Pope Benedict XVI last month.

Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi said 153 cardinals met at the Vatican on Friday morning to discuss the events surrounding the procedures to elect a new pope. Cardinal Dean Angelo Sodano informed the College of Cardinals that 115 out of 117 Cardinal electors are now present, but that two other electors would not attend. Cardinal Julius Riyadi Darmaatmadja of Indonesia has chosen not to attend because his vision is continuing to deteriorate and Cardinal Keith O`Brien of Scotland will stay away for "personal reasons." O`Brien announced his resignation last month following allegations of inappropriate conduct and later admitted that his sexual conduct had at times been "below standard." "The Cardinal Dean asked if the College accepted to recognize the reasons presented," said Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi in a communique issued by the Holy See press office. "The response was affirmative. The definitive number of Cardinal electors is thus established at 115." Sodano then noted that, because no other Cardinal electors are expected to attend, it would be unnecessary to wait the previously required fifteen days from the beginning of the Sede Vacante to begin the conclave. Benedict, days before his resignation last month, changed the church`s law to allow the conclave to begin as soon as all electors are present. The group of cardinals discussed a wide range of topics during the congregation on Friday morning, Lombardi said. "Topics covered included: inter-religious dialogue, bioethics, justice in the world, the Gospel as a proclamation of love, joy, and mercy, collegiality, and the role of women in the Church," he said. During a second meeting on Friday afternoon, the congregation decided that the conclave for the election of the pope will begin on Tuesday. It is expected to begin in the afternoon after a `pro eligendo Romano Pontifice` mass is celebrated in St. Peter`s Basilica in the morning. There is no clear favorite to take over as the head of the Catholic Church, which has faced a number of scandals in recent years. Pope Benedict XVI surprised the world last month when he said he would resign on February 28, making him the first pontiff to resign the papal office in nearly 600 years. The 85-year-old pope made the shocking announcement during a meeting of cardinals at the Vatican, surprising even his closest aides. "After having repeatedly examined my conscience before God, I have come to the certainty that my strengths, due to an advanced age, are no longer suited to an adequate exercise of the Petrine ministry," he said on February 11. Cardinals elected Benedict XVI as pope in April 2005 following the death of Pope John Paul II, who became one of the most beloved popes in Catholic history. John Paul II remained pope until his death at the age of 84 after a long battle with Parkinson`s disease and other ailments. Benedict XVI traveled to his summer residence in the Italian town of Castel Gandolfo on February 28 and will eventually move to a cloistered residence in the Vatican. He is now known as pope emeritus but has said he will not take part in the conclave to elect a new pope.

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United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com