

RESIGNATION OF THE ROMAN PONTIFF

The possibility of the resignationⁱ of a reigning Pontiff is recognised in the Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church. The Code states, "If it should happen that the Roman Pontiff resigns his office, it is required for validity that he makes the resignation freely and that it be duly manifested, but not that it be accepted by anyone" (Canon 332, §2).

The norms, promulgated in 1996 by John Paul II, for the election of a Roman Pontiff also recognise that a vacancy in the office of the Bishop of Rome can occur not only as a result of the death of a Pope but also by his valid resignation (*Universi Dominici Gregis*, Part I, Chapter 1, §3 and Chapter 3, §77).

Following Pope Benedict XVI's resignation coming into effect at 8.00pm on Thursday 28 February, the office of the Roman Pontiff (the Pope) will become vacant and a new Bishop of Rome will need to be elected. The current Holy Father will at that point cease to be the Bishop of Rome and will no longer hold the title of Pope and will return to the use of his baptismal name, together with the customary mode of address pertaining to a Cardinal Bishop, in all formal modes of address.

During the period of the vacancy in the office of Roman Pontiff, the governance of the Church will be entrusted to the College of Cardinals solely for the dispatch of ordinary business and of matters which cannot be postponed, and for the preparation of everything necessary for the election of a new Pope. The College of Cardinals cannot, however, exercise any power or jurisdiction which is proper to that office of the Roman Pontiff. The Cardinal Camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church, currently Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, has the duty of safeguarding and administering the goods and temporal rights of the Holy See.

It is the responsibility of the Dean of the College of Cardinals, currently Cardinal Angelo Sodano, to convoke the Congregations of the Cardinals for the election.

ⁱ Six Popes, each under very different historical circumstances, have either resigned or abdicated their office as Roman Pontiff: Pontian (in 235); Silverius (in 537); John XVIII (in 1009); Benedict IX (in 1045); Celestine V (in 1294); and, Gregory XII (in 1415).