

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Looking at the Church's hierarchy
- » Finding out about papal elections in the Vatican
- » Discovering the long line of papal succession
- » Meeting some influential popes
- » Taking a look at the Second Vatican Council

## Chapter **1**

# Becoming and Leading as Pope

**B**est known throughout the world and among more than 1 billion Catholics as *the pope*, the bishop of Rome is the supreme and visible head of the Catholic Church. The word *pope* is actually an English translation of the Italian *il Papa*, meaning ‘father,’ which leads you to another title for the pope — *Holy Father*. Just as a Catholic priest is called “Father” in a spiritual sense, the pope is called “Holy Father” by Catholics all over the world.

He has a slew of other titles, too: Successor of St. Peter, Vicar of Christ, Primate of Italy, Supreme Pontiff, Roman Pontiff, Sovereign of the Vatican City State, and Head of the College of Bishops. The most common and best-known titles, however, are pope, Holy Father, and Roman Pontiff.

Think you’re under pressure at work? The pope has *two* big jobs: He’s the bishop of Rome *and* the head of the entire Catholic Church. In this chapter you discover how one becomes pope, how he instructs the faithful, how he spends his time, where he lives, and some men who’ve held that role.

# Getting the Job

The *College of Cardinals* elects the pope. Nope, that's not a university where priests and bishops learn how to become cardinals. Unlike Notre Dame and The Catholic University of America, the *College of Cardinals* merely refers to all the cardinals around the world, just as the *College of Bishops* is a way of describing all the world's Catholic bishops.



REMEMBER

In the Catholic hierarchy, priests get promoted to be bishops or archbishops. And bishops and archbishops get promoted to be cardinals. There is precedent for priests being named directly to cardinal, but it's usually after the man is 80 years old.

The pope handpicks bishops to become *cardinals*, and their primary function in life is to elect a new pope when the old pope dies or resigns. Because most modern popes live at least ten years in office (except Pope John Paul I, who lived only one month), cardinals do have other work to do instead of just waiting around for the boss to pass on. (For details about cardinals and their jobs, see Book 1, Chapter 5.) Cardinals under the age of 80 are eligible to vote for the next pope.

The limit of electors is set at 120, but at one point, Pope John Paul II (who was pope from 1978 to 2005) had appointed so many that the number of eligible voters reached 137. With retirements and deaths, only 117 eligible voting cardinals remained when Pope John Paul II died in 2005. His successor, Pope Benedict XVI, created 90 new cardinals in five consistories. Pope Francis has, as of this writing, chosen over 80 of the now 132 current electors. And in typical Pope Francis fashion, he made a point of making his choices less Euro-centric. He even appointed cardinals from East Timor, Paraguay, and Singapore for the first time.

The electors can vote for any other cardinal or any Catholic bishop, priest, deacon, or layman anywhere in the world and of any liturgical rite, such as Latin, Byzantine, and so on. Normally, the cardinals select another cardinal, both because they know each other better and because the number of cardinals to choose from is small compared to the thousands of bishops around the world and the nearly 415,000 priests. Although extremely rare, if a layman is elected pope (as in the case of Benedict IX), he first has to be ordained a deacon, then a priest, and then a bishop before he can function as pope because the authority resides in his office as bishop of Rome. If a priest is chosen, he needs to be ordained a bishop prior to being installed as pope.

## Are there pope primaries?

The government of the Catholic Church, called the *hierarchy*, is more like a monarchy than a democracy. Catholicism is hierarchical in that one person, the pope, is supreme head over the universal Church. Yet bishops govern the local churches in a geographical district called the *diocese*, and pastors (or priests) represent the bishop in each local parish. Individual Catholics don't vote for the next pope or for their bishop or pastor. The Catholic hierarchy operates like a military chain of command as opposed to an elected, representative government. So, nope — no local primaries, no election campaigns, no debates, no political ads, and no popular vote.

Other religions and Christian Churches allow for lay participation in positions of authority from a little to a lot, but Catholicism has been predominantly *monarchical* (having a sole person rule) since the appointment of St. Peter. Laypersons are encouraged to participate in other ways. While they aren't allowed to have jurisdictional power, laity serve as consultants and advisors to pastors and bishops. Parish councils and finance committees are composed of lay parishioners who advise the pastor before he makes important decisions. Laity also even serve in the Vatican to advise, counsel, and represent the Holy See to organizations like the United Nations.



TIP

You may have heard the saying: He who enters the conclave a pope leaves a cardinal. The meaning? When a pope becomes sick or elderly or dies, rumors run rampant as to who will take the Chair of St. Peter. Often, the press names certain cardinals as the most likely candidates; they're called *papabile* (meaning *pope-able*) in Italian. But the *papabile* are usually the ones that the other cardinals *never* elect. So if a man enters the *conclave* — the private meeting of all the cardinals for the specific purpose of electing the pope — as a favorite (or worse yet, if he comes off as wanting the job), chances are he will leave a cardinal because his fellow cardinals will choose someone more humble.

## Electing a new pope

No sooner than 15 days and no later than 20 days after the death or resignation of the pope, all the cardinals are summoned to Rome for the secret conclave. *Conclave* comes from the Latin *cum clave*, meaning 'with key,' because the cardinals are literally locked into the Sistine Chapel, the pope's private chapel at the Vatican, until they elect a new pope.

After the cardinals from around the world assemble inside the conclave, they begin discussions and deliberations. Almost like a sequestered jury, the cardinals are permitted no contact with the outside world during the conclave. Under pain of excommunication, no cardinal is ever allowed to discuss what transpires

at these elections — much like in the sacrament of Confession (more on that in Book 2, Chapter 2) — to keep the element of politics and outside influence to a bare minimum.

Historically, the election of a new pope could take place in one of three different forms.

- » **Acclamation:** A name is presented, and everyone unanimously consents without the need of a secret ballot.
- » **Compromise:** Each cardinal casts a secret ballot. If no one achieves a two-thirds majority after several rounds of voting, then the entire College of Cardinals may choose one or several electors to select a candidate, and the entire body is bound to accept that choice. A unanimous vote to employ compromise is necessary for it to be valid.
- » **Scrutiny:** Each cardinal proposes a candidate and gives reasons for his qualifications before the individual cardinals cast their secret ballot. A two-thirds majority decision is needed to elect a new pope.  
  
This is the only valid method currently permitted in papal conclaves.



REMEMBER

Want a peek at what’s going on behind those closed doors? When voting for a new pope, each cardinal writes a name on a piece of paper, folds it twice, and places it on a gold *paten* (plate). The paten is then turned upside down, so the ballot can fall into a *chalice* (cup) underneath. This symbolism is deep, because the paten and chalice are primarily used at the Catholic Mass to hold the wafer of bread and cup of wine that, when consecrated, become the body and blood of Christ during the Eucharistic Prayer.

If no one receives two-thirds of the votes or if the nominee declines the nomination, then chemicals are added to the paper ballots, and they’re burned in the chimney. The chemicals make black smoke, which alerts the crowds gathered outside that a two-thirds majority decision hasn’t yet been made. Previously, wet straw had been added to the ballots before burning to produce the darker color. But now, chemicals and dyes are used to avoid mix-ups or uncertainty when the smoke is released.

On the first day, one vote can be taken. On subsequent days, two votes can occur in the morning and two later in the day. The election continues until a pope is elected. In 1996, Pope John Paul II introduced a variation in which if no one was elected by a two-thirds majority after 21 votes, then on the 22nd ballot, the man who received a simple majority (50 percent plus one) was elected pope. Pope Benedict XVI subsequently rescinded that change in 2007 and returned the requirement of two-thirds no matter how long the conclave takes. The longest papal conclave on record was the one trying to choose the successor of Pope Clement IV in the

13th century. In that instance, it took two years and nine months to finally elect a new pope. However, in more recent years, the conclave typically doesn't last more than a week.

When someone receives two-thirds of the votes and he accepts, the ballots are burned with different chemicals, which blows white smoke to alert the crowds and world that a new pope has been elected.

After a cardinal (or another candidate if a cardinal is not chosen) has received a two-thirds majority vote, he's asked whether he accepts the nomination. If he accepts, he's then asked, "By what name are you to be addressed?"



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

Pope John II (533 A.D.) was the first to change his name when he was elected pope because he was born with the name Mercury after the pagan god. So he chose the Christian name John instead. But it was not until Sergius IV (1009) that all subsequent popes continued the tradition of changing their name at the time of election. So, for example, Pope Pius XII (1939) was originally Eugenio Pacelli, John XXIII (1958) was Angelo Roncalli, Paul VI (1963) was Giovanni Montini, John Paul I (1978) was Albino Luciani, John Paul II (1978) was Karol Wojtyła, Benedict XVI (2005) was Josef Ratzinger, and Francis (2013) was Jorge Mario Bergoglio.

Pope Francis, the current pope as of this writing, confirmed that he chose his name after St. Francis of Assisi (you can read more about him in Book 4, Chapter 4) because he is "the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation," which have all certainly been hallmarks of how Pope Francis has spent his time as the head of the Church.

## Is the Pope Really Infallible?

Catholicism maintains that the pope is *infallible*, incapable of error, when he teaches a doctrine on faith or morals to the universal Church in his unique office as supreme head. When the pope asserts his official authority in matters of faith and morals to the whole Church, the Holy Spirit guards him from error. Papal infallibility doesn't mean that the pope can't make *any* mistakes. He's not infallible in scientific, historical, political, philosophical, geographic, or any other matters — just faith and morals. For example, the pope could say the Indianapolis Colts are going to win the next Super Bowl. And maybe he wants them to (who knows if he likes American football or not), but that doesn't mean they will. Then again, having the pope praying for them to win probably wouldn't hurt.

It boils down to trust. Catholics trust that the Holy Spirit protects *them* from being taught or forced to believe erroneous doctrines by preventing a pope from issuing

them. Whether the Holy Spirit’s intervention is as subtle as getting the pope to change his mind or as drastic as striking him dead, in any event, Catholics firmly believe that God loves them and loves the truth so much that He would intervene and prevent a pope from imposing a false teaching upon the whole Church. This belief doesn’t mean that personally and individually, the pope is free from all error. He could privately be wrong as long as he doesn’t attempt to impose or teach that error to the universal Church, because at that point the Holy Spirit would somehow stop him from doing so.



REMEMBER

God sent an angel to Joseph, Jesus’s earthly foster father, so that he wouldn’t abandon Mary, the Mother of God, when he discovered she was pregnant out of wedlock. That’s just one example of how God can send messengers to ensure things go the way He plans.

## Taking a closer look at what it means to be infallible

Infallibility is widely misunderstood. It’s *not* the same as the Catholic beliefs of *inspiration* or *impeccability*:

- » **Inspiration** is a special gift of the Holy Spirit, which He gave to the *sacred authors*, those who wrote the Sacred Scripture (the Bible), so that only the things God wanted written down *were* written down — no more, no less. So the pope isn’t inspired, but Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were when they wrote their Gospels.
- » **Impeccability** is the absence and inability to commit sin. Only Jesus Christ, being the Son of God, and His Blessed Mother had impeccability — via a special grace from God. Popes aren’t impeccable, so they’re capable of sin — which, by the way, was visible in the case of the first pope, St. Peter, when he denied Christ three times just before the Crucifixion (Matthew 26:69–75). It’s for this reason that even popes go to the sacrament of Confession.

Everything the sacred authors wrote in the Bible is inspired, but not everything every pope says or writes is infallible. *Infallibility* means that if the pope attempts to teach a false doctrine on faith or morals, the Holy Spirit prevents him (even by death) from imposing such an error on the faithful. So, for example, no pope can declare, “As of today, the number of commandments is nine instead of ten.” Nor can he declare, “Jesus was not a man” or “Jesus was not the Son of God.”

Infallibility also doesn’t mean perfection. Infallible statements aren’t perfect statements, so they can be improved so that subsequent popes can use better

or more accurate language. Yet infallible statements can never be contradicted, rejected, or refuted.

So according to Catholicism, an immoral pope (you'll find several in Church history) can sin like any man and will answer to God for his evil deeds. However, as supreme head of the Church, the pope retains his infallibility on matters of faith and morals as long as he remains pope.

No pope in 2,000 years has formally and officially taught an error of faith or morals to the universal Church. Individually, some may have been poor or inadequate theologians or philosophers, and some may have had erroneous ideas about science. That has nothing to do with papal infallibility, however, because the main objective is to preserve the integrity of Catholic faith for all the members at all times and in all places.

The pope can exercise his papal infallibility in two ways. One is called the *Extraordinary Magisterium*, and the other is called *Ordinary Magisterium*. The word *magisterium* is from the Latin word *magister* meaning 'teacher,' so the *Magisterium* is the teaching authority of the Church, which is manifested by the pope alone and/or the pope along with the bishops all over the world.

## The Extraordinary Magisterium

Extraordinary means just that, out of the ordinary. When an Ecumenical (General) Council is convened, presided over, and approved by the pope, and he issues definitive decrees, they're considered infallible because they come from the Extraordinary Magisterium. The Church has held an all-time total of only 21 councils. These are gatherings of the world's bishops and cardinals. Sometimes priests, deacons, and laity are invited to observe, but only bishops and the pope can discuss and vote. The culmination of these councils is a written letter that explains the faith, interprets Scripture, or settles disputed topics of faith and morals. They never contradict the Bible but apply biblical truths to contemporary concerns and problems, as well as giving more understanding to essential core beliefs. The names and years of the councils throughout Church history are as follows:

1. Nicaea (325)
2. First Constantinople (381)
3. Ephesus (431)
4. Chalcedon (451)
5. Second Constantinople (553)

6. Third Constantinople (680–81)
7. Second Nicaea (787)
8. Fourth Constantinople (869–70)
9. First Lateran (1123)
10. Second Lateran (1139)
11. Third Lateran (1179)
12. Fourth Lateran (1215)
13. First Lyons (1245)
14. Second Lyons (1274)
15. Vienne (1311–12)
16. Constance (1414–18)
17. Basel-Ferrara-Florence (1431–45)
18. Fifth Lateran (1512–17)
19. Trent (1545–63)
20. First Vatican (1869–70)
21. Second Vatican (1962–65)

The Ecumenical Councils have defined doctrines such as the divinity of Christ (Nicea); the title of Mary as the Mother of God (Ephesus); the two natures of Christ, human and divine, being united in the one divine person (Chalcedon); *transubstantiation* to describe how the bread and wine are changed at Mass into the Body and Blood of Christ (Lateran IV); the seven sacraments, Sacred Scripture, and Sacred Tradition (see Book 1, Chapter 2), and other responses to the Reformation (Trent); and papal infallibility (Vatican I). These conciliar decrees and *ex cathedra* papal pronouncements form the Extraordinary Magisterium.

*Ex cathedra* (Latin for ‘from the chair’) pronouncements from the pope are considered infallible teachings. The only two *ex cathedra* pronouncements in 2,000 years have been the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and the Assumption (1950). When the pope teaches *ex cathedra*, he’s exercising his universal authority as Supreme Teacher of a doctrine on faith or morals, and he’s incapable of error. Catholics consider the Assumption of Mary and the Immaculate Conception infallible teachings because they involve the solemn, full, and universal papal authority.



TIP

The word *cathedral* comes from the Latin *cathedra* because it's the church where the bishop's chair (*cathedra*) resides. The chair is symbolic of authority going back to Roman days when Caesar or his governors sat on a chair and made public decisions, pronouncements, or judgments. When the pope teaches *ex cathedra*, he's not physically sitting on a particular chair but exercising his universal authority as Supreme Teacher.

Unlike governments that separate their executive, legislative, and judicial branches, in the Catholic Church, the pope is all three rolled into one. He's the chief judge, the chief lawmaker, and the commander in chief all at the same time. That's why the triple crown (also known as a *tiara* or *triregnum*) was used in papal coronations — to symbolize his three-fold authority and that he's higher in dignity and authority than a king (one crown) or even an emperor (double crown). (Pope Paul VI was the last pope to wear the tiara. It's a matter of personal choice and preference now.)

## The Ordinary Magisterium

The second way that an infallible teaching is taught to Catholics is through the *Ordinary Magisterium*, which is the more common and typical manner, hence the reason why it's called *ordinary*. This teaching of the popes is consistent, constant, and universal through their various documents, letters, papal encyclicals, decrees, and so on. It's never a new doctrine but rather one that has been taught *ubique, semper et ab omnibus* (Latin for 'everywhere, always and by all'). In other words, when the pope reinforces, reiterates, or restates the consistent teaching of his predecessors and of the bishops united with him around the world, that's considered the Ordinary Magisterium and should be treated as infallible doctrine.

When popes write papal documents (anything authored by a pope), the title they use to refer to themselves the most is *Servant of the Servants of God* (*Servus Servorum Dei* in Latin). St. Gregory the Great (590 to 604) was the first pope to use this title. Check out the different types of papal documents from the most solemn on down:

- »» Papal Bulls
- »» Papal Encyclicals
- »» Papal Briefs
- »» Apostolic Exhortations
- »» Apostolic Constitutions
- »» Apostolic Letters
- »» *Motu Proprios*

Prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962 to 1965), more commonly known as Vatican II, the type of papal document the pope chose determined how much authority he intended to exercise. The preceding list indicates the order of authority that various papal documents traditionally had. For example, the lowest level was the *Motu Proprio*, which is a Latin phrase meaning ‘of his own initiative.’ Somewhat like an international memo, it’s a short papal letter granting a dispensation or making a modification applying to the whole world but on a disciplinary matter only, such as an issue that has nothing to do with doctrine. An example of *Motu Proprio* was when John Paul II granted permission to celebrate the Tridentine Mass (the order and structure of the Mass as it was celebrated between the Council of Trent and Vatican II). On the other hand, *Papal Bulls* were considered the highest authority.

Since Vatican II, however, the *content* and *context* of the document determine the degree of authority and not just the type of papal document. If the pope intends to definitively teach the universal Church on a matter of faith or morals, then he is expressing his supreme authority as head of the Church. When John Paul II issued his Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* in 1994, he officially declared that the Catholic Church has no power to ordain women. *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* was *not* an *ex cathedra* papal statement, but it’s part of the Ordinary Magisterium, and thus, according to the Prefect for the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the teaching is infallible. The Cardinal Prefect is the pope’s watchdog to investigate all suspected cases of *heresy* (false teaching) and to explain official church dogma.

*Papal encyclicals* are letters addressed to the world on contemporary issues and concerns such the sanctity of life or the importance of protecting the environment. *Encyclical* comes from the Latin word for ‘circular,’ because these documents are meant to circulate around the world. The name of each letter consists of the first two words of the letter in Latin, because every official document coming from the Vatican is still written in Latin. Encyclicals aren’t *ex cathedra* pronouncements. Check out the nearby sidebar for some examples of popes who put encyclicals to good use.

*Encyclicals* are the routine, day-to-day, consistent teachings of the Ordinary Magisterium, which is equally infallible when it concerns faith and morals and reiterates the constant, consistent, and universal teaching of the popes and bishops. Their content requires religious submission of mind and will of faithful Catholics around the world. So-called dissent from papal teaching in encyclicals isn’t part of Catholic belief. The Catholic faithful willfully conform to papal teaching and don’t dispute it.

## A FEW ENCYCLICALS THROUGH THE YEARS

More formal than a homily or sermon, encyclicals have been used by popes for generations to address various topics concerning the Catholic faith. Pope Benedict XIV is credited with writing the first one way back in 1740. Since then, there have been close to 300 encyclicals written (with one pope — Pope Leo XIII — writing nearly a third of them during his 1878 to 1903 papacy).

Here are a few encyclicals worth noting:

- **Leo XIII** wrote *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, which discusses capital and labor. It defends private property and business, as well as the right of workers to form trade unions and guilds.
- **Paul VI** presented the Church's teaching on abortion and artificial contraception in *Humanae Vitae* in 1968. It's not an *ex cathedra* statement, but *Humanae Vitae* is a part of the constant, consistent, and universal teachings of the popes and bishops over the ages. (For more about the Church's stand on artificial contraception, as well as other sticky issues, turn to Book 2, Chapter 7.)
- **John Paul II** wrote *Laborem Exercens* in 1981 on human work; *Veritatis Splendor* in 1993 on the natural moral law; *Evangelium Vitae* in 1995 on the dignity, sanctity, and inviolability of human life and the things that threaten it, such as abortion, euthanasia, and the death penalty; and *Fides et Ratio* in 1998 on the compatibility of faith and reason.
- **Benedict XVI's** first encyclical was *Deus Caritas Est* (2005) on the biblical passage that "God is Love." It explains that divine love and human love are based on the same premise: All love must be both "give and take," sacrificial and possessive.
- **Francis** wrote one of his encyclicals, *Laudato si'* (2015), about what he calls our common home. In it, he highlights sustainability in the midst of environmental degradation. He also brings to light how much pollution, climate change, and our current throwaway culture lead to health hazards, ruined land, and a world full of waste. He encourages us to come together as a community to produce solutions that will save the planet for future generations. (You can read more on his other encyclicals in Book 5, Chapter 3.)

## Now That's Job Security! Serving for Life

Popes are elected for life unless they voluntarily — without pressure or coercion — resign from office. Pope Pontian was the first one to abdicate from the office in 235 A.D. Pope St. Peter Celestine V was the most famous one to resign, going back

to monastic life in 1294. Pope Gregory XII quit in 1415, and for nearly 600 years, no one else did so until Pope Benedict XVI resigned in 2013. No one can depose a pope even if he becomes insane, sick, or corrupt. No ecumenical council has the authority to remove him from office. So when a bad pope gets in (and from time to time, a bad pope has been elected), the only course of action is to pray to St. Joseph for a happy death of the pope in question. (St. Joseph is the patron saint of a happy death, because he probably died of natural causes in the arms of Mary and Jesus.)

Although even one bad pope is one too many, Jesus Himself picked 12 imperfect sinners to be His apostles. The first pope, St. Peter (more on him in Book 4, Chapter 3), weakened and denied Christ three times, and Judas, one of the first bishops, betrayed Him for 30 pieces of silver. One repented; the other hanged himself instead of seeking mercy.

This is our two cents' worth: Of the 266 popes in history, only a dozen were real scoundrels and caused great scandal. Eighty popes are recognized as holy saints, leaving 174 pretty good, all-right guys. Better stats than for presidents, prime ministers, or monarchs around the world.

## What Popes Do All Day

While being pope might sound like a cushy job, popes don't get to sit around all day doing nothing. And since the days of Peter (the first pope), the job has arguably gotten more demanding. With the advent (not to be confused with Advent, which you can read more about in Book 3, Chapter 5) of social media and the ability to report and receive news 24/7, there are more people than ever watching, posting, and potentially turning into memes and GIFs what the pope says or does. That's a lot of pressure — especially when you have a schedule as packed as the pope's typically is.

When the pope is not busy writing encyclicals and other official documents, guiding the faithful, or, you know, praying, he typically accomplishes a lot in the name of the Church.

A few other pope-ly duties include:

- » Attending and celebrating Mass
- » Offering general audiences (more on that in the "Seeing the Pope in Person: Papal Audiences" section later in this chapter)
- » Presiding over special events like the canonization of saints

- » Meeting with heads of state, dignitaries, and other guests
- » Appointing bishops and cardinals (amongst other various positions and committees related to the functioning of the Church)
- » Meeting with each bishop at least once every five years
- » Visiting various countries and religious sites

With a schedule like that, it's no wonder the pope probably isn't up to date on the latest season of *Stranger Things*. Thankfully, he's got a team of people around (usually made up of personal secretaries, assistants, and the like) to keep him going on schedule and help run his household.

## Where the Pope Hangs His Hat

The pope's home is *Vatican City*, an independent nation since the Lateran Agreement of 1929, when Italy recognized its sovereignty. Vatican City covers only 0.2 square miles (108.7 acres), has fewer than a thousand inhabitants, and rests in the middle of Rome.



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

After 300 years of Roman persecution, the Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in 313 A.D. with the Edict of Milan and thus formally ended the state-sponsored persecutions of the Christians. In 321 A.D., he donated the imperial property of the Lateran Palace to the bishop of Rome, which began a trend of donating property in recompense for all the land and possessions that the Romans took from the early Christians during the pagan era.

The donation of large estates stopped around 600 A.D., but 154 years later, King Pepin (the Short) of the Franks (who was also the father of Charlemagne) issued the Donation of 754 A.D., from which the pope would govern the territory of central Italy (16,000 square miles). From 754 to 1870, Vatican City was part of the Papal States, also known as *Patrimonium Sancti Petri* (the Patrimony of St. Peter). During the unification of Italy, Giuseppe Garibaldi and Count Camillo Benso di Cavour, the two men most responsible for creating the Kingdom and modern nation of Italy in 1870, seized the Papal States and, for all practical purposes, ended the secular rule of the popes.

Today, Vatican City is the smallest independent nation in the world. Ironically, it also has the largest number of embassies and ambassadors around the globe. Guglielmo Marconi, the inventor of radio, built a radio for Pope Pius XI; thus Vatican Radio began in 1931. Now, in addition to a radio and short-wave antennae, the Vatican also has television and Internet programming. Not to mention that the

pope is even on social media. That's right. You can follow Pope Francis on Twitter. His handle is @Pontifex. It's the same handle that Pope Benedict XVI had before him (as he was the first pope on Twitter). And it's presumably the same handle that future popes will use, as it gets passed from pope to pope so new accounts don't have to be made.

The only real citizens of Vatican City, aside from the pope, are the cardinals who live in Rome, directors of other Vatican offices, and full-time diplomats who work for the *Holy See* (the pope and the various offices of Church government in the Vatican). These diplomats, clergy and laity alike, come from countries all over the world. They still retain their own nationality and citizenship but are given a Vatican passport while employed to represent the Vatican. Originally sent to Rome in 1506, about 107 Swiss guards protect the pope, decorating the *Piazza* (outdoor square where people gather) with their colorful uniforms. In addition, plain-clothes Swiss guards, with electronic surveillance and sophisticated weapons, also keep a close eye on the Holy Father, especially since the attempted assassination of John Paul II in 1981.

## Seeing the Pope in Person: Papal Audiences

To some, the pope might seem as inaccessible as God, but you can actually meet the pope (or at least see him in person) fairly easily if you happen to be in Rome, as the following sections explain.

### Wednesday appearances

When not out traveling or attending to other duties, popes typically hold public audiences on Wednesdays in Rome. This gives Catholics (and non-Catholics) around the world a chance to see the leader of the Catholic Church. For Americans, for example, it's akin to being able to see the president of the United States speak.

The pope starts by riding around a blocked-off pathway in the popemobile, which isn't exactly the Batmobile but more of something slightly resembling an enhanced white golf cart. After waving to crowds and/or stopping to interact with a few lucky audience members, he continues on to the staged area in St. Peter's Square, right in front of St. Peter's Basilica (which you can visit, too). The square can hold up to 80,000, so be prepared for crowds.

Usually, the pope offers a short teaching or reading before greeting various visiting groups. He will also extend a blessing (see the sidebar, “Special blessings for brides and grooms”) to those attending (and on any religious objects they brought to be blessed). The teachings and readings are offered in a variety of languages to be as inclusive as possible to visitors from the world over. The languages typically include English, French, German, Polish, Portuguese, and Spanish, amongst others.

While you have to arrive early to go through security and find a good spot, this is a chance to spend a longer time in the pope’s presence than his Sunday appearances (more on those in the following section).

As of this writing, tickets for these audiences are free and can be requested online. We recommend visiting [www.papalaudience.org/tickets](http://www.papalaudience.org/tickets) for all the details on how to get tickets.

## Sunday appearances

Once again, when the pope is in town (in Rome), you can try and catch a glimpse of him from St. Peter’s Square. At noon local time (though you’ll want to get there early), the pope speaks from the window of his apartment — again various languages are used. This consists of a short reading or teaching accompanied by the Angelus prayer, a prayer often prayed three times a day (at 9am, noon, and 6pm) in recognition and celebration of the Incarnation of Christ and Mary’s ‘yes’ to being the Mother of God. The pope then concludes with a blessing, and the entire experience lasts less than half an hour.

## SPECIAL BLESSINGS FOR BRIDES AND GROOMS

In a custom called *Sposi Novelli*, which means ‘newlyweds’ in Italian, recent brides and grooms can actually meet (yes, face-to-face!) the pope. It’s a way for the pope to bless their marriage.

This meeting happens during a Wednesday audience, but there are a few criteria that brides and grooms need to meet. Not only will you need to get tickets, but you’ll also have to bring — and wear — your wedding attire (including your wedding dress. . .and who thought you wouldn’t get to wear it again?). You’ll also need to plan to go within two months of your wedding in order to be eligible for this opportunity (though some leeway may be given). So, while you’re planning your honeymoon, don’t forget to plan your papal visit, too. Or why not just make that your honeymoon?

# Some Popes of Note

The *pontificate* (tenure of a pope) can last a matter of days or several decades, but in their time leading as pope, some men stand out for the ways they've shaped the Church and faith — and some even became saints along the way (more on how to become a saint in Book 4, Chapter 2).

## Pope Innocent III

Pontificate: 1198–1216

Born in Italy under the name Lotario de' Conti, Innocent was born into a family that produced nine popes. So you could say becoming pope was in his blood.

As pope, he was a staunch defender of the faith, calling heresy treason against God. He eventually even launched a crusade, which would last until after his death.

However, he is probably best known for bringing together one of the most important medieval councils. In 1215, he convened the Fourth Lateran Council, which had three focuses: Church reform, crusading, and fighting heresy. The council resulted in vast reforms as attendees drafted and adopted over seventy canons. These canons touched on everything from defining Church teaching on transubstantiation (the process of bread and wine becoming the Body and Blood of Jesus, which you can read more about in Book 2, Chapter 2), to prohibiting drunkenness amongst the clergy, to how to penalize heretics, to not having the sons of clergymen succeed their fathers.

As if those additions weren't enough of a legacy, Innocent has the honor of being one of only two popes (Pope Gregory IX is the other) who are featured amongst the historical figures above the doors of the U.S. House of Representatives — which is due to his influence over American law.

## Pope St. Leo I

Pontificate: 440 A.D. – 461 A.D.

Feast day: April 11

Leo was a deacon under Pope Celestine I and Pope Sixtus III. Along with Pope Gregory and Pope Nicholas, he's one of only three popes to be given the title “the Great.”

A learned, erudite, and accomplished orator, Leo dealt with heresies head-on. Ninety-six of his sermons and 143 letters survive today that concern the major theological errors of Leo's time.

Although he couldn't attend the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), he wrote a letter known as the "Tome of Pope St. Leo" that was so clear and well received that the council fathers said, "God has spoken to us through Peter and in the person of Leo, his successor."

Historically, Leo is remembered as the one man in all of human history who was able to dissuade Attila the Hun from sacking Rome. As Attila prepared for war in his camp outside of Rome, Leo rode up on his horse, not in armor but wearing the ecclesiastical vestments of a bishop. Attila had great awe and respect for Leo after seeing such faith and courage in an old man.

Pope St. Leo is buried in St. Peter's Basilica.

## Pope St. Pius X

Pontificate: 1903–1914

Feast day: August 21

A great reformer of the Church, Giuseppe Melchiorre Sarto took the name Pius at the start of his papacy.

Among his many reforms were his attempts to address the heresy of modernism. He sought to renew Bible study and liturgical music, reform the Roman Missal, and renew the Code of Canon Law — the laws that govern Church practice. He renewed and revised seminary life and training, encouraged children to receive Holy Communion at the age of reason, and championed daily Communion for all.

St. Pius X condemned the secular French states for breaking with an earlier agreement in matters of property. He defended the rights of the downtrodden in Peru, Ireland, Poland, and Portugal. He sent many missionaries to the United States to help the newly established immigrant Church. And some even received miracles from God through the prayers of this kind, religiously devout, and charitable pope while he was alive.

Pope Pius XII canonized him a saint in 1954.

## Pope John XXIII

Pontificate: 1958–1963

Feast day: October 11

Often referred to as “the Good Pope” because of how well loved and admired he was, John was born Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli in Italy. The fourth of thirteen children, John was born into a family of sharecroppers, which was in stark contrast to many other popes who came from rich, aristocratic families.

He was ordained a priest in 1904 but was drafted into the Italian army during World War I, serving as a chaplain. Then, during World War II, he worked to help refugees and saved Jewish people from the Nazis — with some saying he saved 24,000 people.

When he was elected pope, due to his being older (76 years old, to be exact), many thought he was a transitional candidate who could hold things together for a short time. But John didn’t plan to sit there and be quiet. Instead, he convened the Second Vatican Council in 1962, which he called a “New Pentecost.” He wanted to update Church teachings and inspire Christian unity.

He died in 1963, and the cause for beatification was opened swiftly thereafter. He was declared a saint in 2014 by Pope Francis.

## Pope Benedict XVI

Pontificate: 2005–2013

Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger was born in Germany, and when he was a young child he declared his intent to become a cardinal after welcoming a visiting cardinal. However, before he could join the forces supporting God’s work, he was conscripted into the mandatory Hitler Youth, despite his family (and he himself) detesting the Nazis. He was eventually interned as a prisoner of war before being released in 1945 — which finally allowed him time to enter the seminary.

As pope (see Figure 1-1), he became known as a prolific writer. However, it was how his papacy ended that many remember. Shocking many, Benedict resigned his position as pope in February 2013, making him the first pope since 1415 to give up his post. He cited his advanced age and failing mental and physical condition as his reasons for stepping down. He was referred to as Pope Emeritus (a term for a retired pope) until his death on December 31, 2022.



**FIGURE 1-1:**  
Pope Joseph  
Benedict XVI

© miqu77/Shutterstock

## A Brief History of the Second Vatican Council and the Popes Who Got Us There

Pope Pius XII laid the groundwork for change in the 1950s, a whole decade before the Vatican II Council. His encyclical *Mediator Dei* (1947) paved the way for the first document of Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), in 1963. In *Mediator Dei*, Pius XII encouraged and exhorted Catholics not to be mere bystanders and not to just sit as a passive audience when at Mass or any sacred celebration of the sacraments. Even when the liturgy was exclusively in Latin, the goal was to foster participation by having the congregation verbally respond to prayers from the priest, join together in singing hymns, and make the same external gestures (like kneeling, standing, and sitting) with one another. These external signs of participation were to be combined with an interior, internal, and spiritual participation of uniting heart, mind, and soul to what was happening in the sanctuary and on the altar.

Vatican II took place in the 20th century, almost a hundred years after its predecessor, Vatican I, which defined the dogma of *papal infallibility* (the Catholic teaching that the pope is prevented by the Holy Spirit from teaching an erroneous doctrine on faith and morals when speaking to the Universal Church). The Franco-German War abruptly ended the Vatican I Council (1869 to 1870), which

was supposed to discuss other issues besides papal infallibility, such as Church law and discipline, missionary work, and the sociopolitical world, amongst others

## The focus of Vatican II

Unlike the previous 20 councils, Vatican II was not a *doctrinal council* (a council convened to resolve theological controversy); instead, it was called to be a *pastoral council* (one that did not define any new doctrines and instead focused on the pastoral and spiritual welfare of the Church).

When Angelo Roncalli was elected Pope John XXIII in 1958, he wanted to revise the then-archaic 1917 *Code of Canon Law*. This body of ecclesiastical laws governed the Universal Church, from the Vatican all the way down to the local bishop and diocese and to the local pastor and parish. Pope John XXIII and his immediate successor, Pope Paul VI, wanted to update the Catholic Church. They weren't interested in changing the content of teaching or the substance and essence of worship — they wanted to change the way and manner in which the doctrine was explained and the liturgy was celebrated.



REMEMBER

It was clear from day one that the pope did not intend in any way, shape, or form to alter, revise, change, remove, or add to the ancient deposit of faith. The content of faith (in other words, doctrine) and the celebration of faith (sacraments) would remain intact, while the mode and manner in which they were explained and conducted would adapt to modern expressions and experiences. The *what* would remain the same, but the *how* would be another matter.

Pope John XXIII died in 1963, soon after he convened Vatican II in 1962. The Council was suspended until the College of Cardinals elected a successor, Giovanni Montini, who took the name Paul VI. Pope Paul VI reconvened the Council and later implemented many of its recommendations and resolutions. Some of those proposals included

- » Allowing greater use of the vernacular (until then, religious ceremonies were celebrated in the Latin language)
- » Restoring the order of permanent deacon
- » Promoting Christian unity (ecumenism) among the various denominations and religions (Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox)
- » Respecting Christianity's Jewish origins and roots
- » Using modern technology and contemporary perspectives to explain the faith

The Sacred Liturgy was the first area of discussion and dealt with the public worship of the Church. The entire Mass (or Eucharistic liturgy) was revamped, not in substance but in appearance. The common language of the local people replaced the universal ecclesiastical tongue of Latin. The priest was allowed to face the people as he celebrated from the altar. Larger selections from the Bible were incorporated so that, in a three-year period, nearly all of the scripture would be read and heard in church by the faithful.

Byzantine (Eastern) Catholics were already accustomed to vernacular as well as liturgical Greek, Old Slavonic, Aramaic, Arabic, and Syriac in their Divine Liturgies, and they always had a permanent diaconate and married clergy. Latin (Western) Catholics, however, thanks to Vatican II, experienced some of these modernizations for the first time. The purpose of the changes was to foster and promote full, active, and conscious participation of the faithful in sacred worship and public liturgy.



REMEMBER

Vatican II was not only pastoral and practical, but truly *catholic* (universal) in the sense that 489 bishops from South America, 404 from North America, 374 from Asia, 84 from Central America, and 75 from Oceania participated, and many non-Catholics (Eastern Orthodox, Protestants, and Muslims, for example) were also invited as guests. Nearly 3,000 people attended the Council in some fashion in the years it was convened from 1963 to 1965.

## Redefining roles and vocations of laity

According to Vatican II, worship shouldn't be seen as the exclusive work of the clergy. Vatican II allowed for lay involvement, such as reading the scriptures, serving at the altar, and, when necessary, assisting with distribution of Holy Communion as extraordinary ministers. The hierarchy was still very much alive and maintained teaching authority and governance over Church matters. But the wisdom, experience, and counsel of the laity were to be solicited and valued. Parishioners would be invited to join pastoral councils and finance committees, which have consultative, though not deliberative, authority to guide the pastor with his pastoral leadership.

Marriage and the single life were respected and honored as equal vocations from God, along with Holy Orders (deacon, priest, and bishop) and religious life (nuns, monks, brothers, and sisters). Laity were encouraged to use their role in the world to enter political, economic, and social life and make it better by using the values and principles of their religious convictions.

## Identifying the effects of the Council

Two main effects came from the Vatican II Council. The first effect was the true intent of the Council, which sought neither to remake the Church nor to redefine the Church's teachings, but to speak and use the language of the time to communicate, explain, and defend what had been believed and taught for 2,000 years. This segment (the hierarchy) of the Church included the pope and most of the bishops who attended Vatican II. Their goal was not to "modernize" Catholicism as much as it was to use modern expressions and perspectives to present the ancient religion to a modern world.

At the same time that this distorted version of Vatican II was being followed, the bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and lay faithful who were loyal to the authentic "spirit of Vatican II" found their guidance in the "letter of Vatican II," or in the actual documents of the Council. Greater exposure to, reflection on, meditation on, and interpretation of the Bible by Catholic teachers and students did not conflict with official and ancient teachings and disciplines; instead, it gave them new meaning and enthusiasm. One of the greatest consequences of the authentic interpretation of Vatican II had nothing to do with power and authority in the Church, which remained hierarchical with the pope and bishops in control, but focused on the "universal call to holiness."

Almost 20 centuries had passed since Jesus walked the Earth and founded His Church on the rock of Peter (Matthew 16:18). During that time, an unofficial notion crept into the common mind, not intended by the Church but never aggressively addressed, either. The idea arose among the regular laity that *sanctity* (holiness or saintliness) was only possible for professional religious people (like priests, monks, and nuns) — someone in Holy Orders or religious vows who wore a *habit* (religious garb), took vows (of poverty, chastity, and obedience), and lived in community (a monastery, friary, convent, abbey, or rectory). The clergy and religious only composed at most 5 to 10 percent of the Church at any one time in Church history, yet many people erroneously thought only the religious or clerical life could make a person holy. And without holiness, you can't go to heaven. Yet, it is erroneous to think that only clergy and religious have access to holiness. All the baptized are offered the same grace and same opportunity to live holy lives.

This false idea came about because, long ago, the clergy and religious spent a good quarter to a third of their day in formal prayer, while most if not all the lay faithful spent 99 percent of their time laboring and working for lords and ladies who owned the property and allowed the peasants to work them for survival. The amount of time spent in prayer at a chapel, oratory, church, or cathedral in many people's minds meant everything. A common person didn't have the time or the opportunity to spend quality time praying in sacred space.



REMEMBER

Vatican II reminded the faithful that everyone who is baptized is called to live a life of holiness. The common priesthood of the laity was not an attempt to clericalize the laity or to laicize the clergy. The idea was simply that Baptism enables anyone and everyone to worship God and to practice the *corporal* (of the body) and spiritual works of mercy, regardless of their state in life (vocation, career, or job).

Reading the Bible, doing mental prayer, saying the Rosary, and other devotions are not the exclusive activity of the clergy. Any baptized person since Vatican II is encouraged to pray, study, and get involved with teaching the faith (or *catechesis*) and living the faith (like the *apostolate* — a ministry suited to the individual believer — and practicing works of mercy). The brainstorm of Vatican II was that any vocation could help achieve holiness and sanctity and, thus, help someone get to heaven, because all vocations are considered ultimately from God. So, a single man or woman working in an office, store, factory, or classroom, the average husband and wife, or mother and father, all had the same chance and opportunity of growing and receiving *divine grace* (the supernatural gift from God that makes you holy) as the priests, nuns, and monks had.

Doing a good job at work, home, or school; obeying the Ten Commandments and Natural Moral Law; reading the Bible, *Lives of the Saints*, papal encyclicals, and other religious works; and cultivating a daily prayer life, a regular sacramental life (weekly Mass and frequent confession), and an active *apostolate* (works of mercy) were seen as duties and obligations of everyone by virtue of their Baptism. Church authority was not what conferred sanctity — divine grace did that. And grace is made available to everyone — clergy and laity alike.

The proper implementation of Vatican II made official Church worship more participatory, not in terms of geographic location (sanctuary or pews), but in terms of external and internal involvement of body (gestures and verbal responses) and soul (intellect and will). Listening to the revealed Word of God (as proclaimed at Sunday Mass) and feeding on the Word (made flesh in Holy Communion) empowers the lay and ordained faithful to seek lives of holiness (in other words, doing the Will of God in everything that is said or done — words and deeds).

