



PAPAL TRANSITION

The period without a Pope - *Sede Vacante* / Interregnum

The period of time when the Chair of Peter, in other words the Papacy, is vacant due to the death of the Pope or his resignation is known as *Sede Vacante* or *Sedes Vacans* (Latin for *vacant see*). The term refers to the vacancy in the Apostolic See. Any see founded by one of the Apostles is an Apostolic See. The ancient sees of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Rome were referred to as Apostolic Sees; however, as early as the fourth century, the title of Apostolic See was reserved for the Diocese of Rome since its bishop –the Pope- is the successor of Peter. This period can also be called the *Interregnum*, literally *between reigns*, referring to times past when popes were monarchs reigning over large territories.

The most common reason for a *Sede Vacante* is the death of a Pope; resignation of the Pontiff is very uncommon. Prior to Benedict XVI's resignation, the last pope to resign was Gregory XII in 1415. Pope Benedict's resignation was effective at 8:00 p.m Rome time (2:00pm U.S. Eastern standard time) on February 28, 2013 and marked the beginning of the current *sede vacante*. The length of the vacancy varies, but it usually lasts less than a month, although there was a long *sede vacante* - 207 days-, between the death of Pope Pius VI on August 30, 1799 and the election of Pope Pius VII on March 13, 1800. The most recent vacancy in the Apostolic See, before Benedict XVI's election, only lasted 17 days.

Ancient traditions have regulated the events that take place during a *sede vacante*. One of the duties of the Pope is to revise existing norms concerning this period and update them as necessary. In 1996, Pope John Paul II issued the Apostolic Constitution *Universi Dominici Gregis* (On the Vacancy of the Apostolic See and the Election of the Roman Pontiff)¹ which provides guidelines for this period of transition. In this document, John Paul II confirmed the traditional norms, but also addressed the particular needs of the Church at the time of his pontificate. On February 22, 2013, Benedict XVI issued the Apostolic Letter *Normas Nonnullas*², in order to provide instruction concerning some modifications to the norms set forth in *Universi Dominici Gregis*.

¹ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_22021996_universi-dominici-gregis_en.html

² http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20130222_normas-nonnulas_en.html

Governance of the Church during a *Sede Vacante*

Authority of the Roman Curia Ceases

The authority of the Cardinal Secretary of State, currently Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, that of the Prefects of the nine Curial Congregations³, and that of the Archbishops who preside over the twelve Pontifical Councils⁴ ceases during a *Sede Vacante*. The College of Cardinals and the Cardinal Camerlengo exercise limited governance of the Church during this transition period.

College of Cardinals

In the history of the Church, there have been three ranks of cardinals – cardinal bishop, cardinal priest and cardinal deacon; however, since 1962, only bishops have been eligible to be named cardinals unless an exemption is granted.⁵ The College of Cardinals has had different roles throughout history.⁶ In our times, the cardinals serve as advisors to the Pope; some are in charge of the different Congregations and offices of the Roman Curia, while some are leaders of an archdiocese or a diocese.

During a *Sede Vacante*, the College of Cardinals has governance of the Vatican City State.⁷ The cardinals are given a copy of the Apostolic Constitution *Universi Dominici Gregis*; they take an oath to observe the norms set forth in the constitution.⁸ An essential role of the Cardinals in the period

³ The nine Curial Congregations are: Doctrine of the Faith, Oriental Churches, Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Causes of Saints, Evangelization of Peoples, Clergy, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Catholic Education, and Bishops.

⁴ The twelve Pontifical Councils are Laity, Promoting Christian Unity, Family, Justice and Peace, "Cor Unum", Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, Health Pastoral Care, Legislative Texts, Inter-religious Dialogue, Culture, Social Communications, and Promoting New Evangelization.

⁵ Cardinal Avery Dulles was named a Cardinal as a priest in 2001; he was never ordained as a bishop
Cardinal Dulles remembered as 'priest's priest' at New York funeral By Beth Griffin - Dec-19-2008
<http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0806373.htm>

⁶ *Universi Dominici Gregis* #23

⁷ *Universi Dominici Gregis* #23

⁸ The oath taken by the cardinals: “*We, the Cardinals of Holy Roman Church, of the Order of Bishops, of Priests and of Deacons, promise, pledge and swear, as a body and individually, to observe exactly and faithfully all the norms contained in the Apostolic Constitution Universi Dominici Gregis of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, and to maintain rigorous secrecy with regard to all matters in any way related to the election of the Roman Pontiff or those which, by their very nature, during the vacancy of the Apostolic See, call for the same secrecy*”. Each cardinal then says, “*And I, N. Cardinal N., so promise, pledge and swear.*” And, placing his hand on the Gospels, he will add: “*So help me God and these Holy Gospels which I now touch with my hand.*” - *Universi Dominici Gregis* #12

of papal transition is to attend the daily meetings known as the **General Congregations** in order to discuss urgent matters and to make preparations for the election of the new Pope. One of the tasks of the General Congregations is to designate two clerics who present to the College of Cardinals two meditations on the challenges facing the Church and the importance of careful discerning of the man who would be elected Pope. On the afternoon of March 4, Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap., preacher of the Pontifical Household, gave the first of two meditations. The Dean of the College of Cardinals, currently Cardinal Angelo Sodano, presides over the General Congregations. After all the preparatory General Congregation meetings and once all the cardinal electors arrive, the College of Cardinals gather as a Conclave to elect the new Pontiff.

Camerlengo

The Camerlengo or Chamberlain of the Church, currently Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, announces the Apostolic See vacancy. Cardinal Bertone was nominated Camerlengo by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007; prior to this office, he served as Secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith from 1995 to 2002. If the vacancy is due to the pope's death, the Camerlengo would inform the Dean of the College of Cardinals of the death. At this time, the Camerlengo assumes responsibility for the administration of the Vatican Palace, the Lateran Palace, and Castel Gandolfo.⁹ Sealing the pope's study and bedroom and destroying the Fisherman's ring¹⁰ are among his duties. He also presides over the **Particular Congregations**. Three cardinals, chosen by lot for three day terms,¹¹ assist the Camerlengo at the Particular Congregations, where less serious matters are discussed. If significant issues arise during a Particular Congregation, these matters should be referred to the General Congregation.¹²

⁹ *Universi Dominici Gregis* #17

¹⁰ The Fisherman's Ring is a symbol of the Papal Office. The destruction of this ring consists in defacing the inscription which bears the Pope's name, thus the ring can no longer be used as a seal.

¹¹ *Universi Dominici Gregis* # 7.

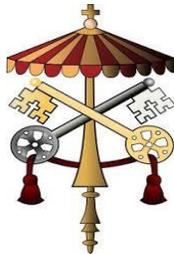
1st General Congregation - On March 4th, the three cardinals were selected by lot to assist the Camerlengo for three days picked were: Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re (Italy); Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe (Italy), and Cardinal Franc Rodé (Slovenia).

5th General Congregation - On March 7th, these three cardinals were selected to assist the Camerlengo for the next three days: Cardinal Béchara Boutros Raï, O.M.M., (patriarch of Antioch of the Maronites, Lebanon); Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, (Republic of Congo), and Cardinal Velasio De Paolis, C.S. (Italy).

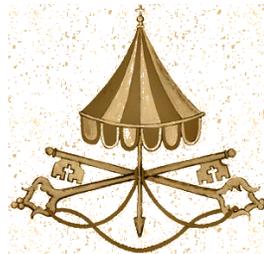
¹² *Universi Dominici Gregis* # 8

Insignia

During this period, the Vatican uses a particular symbol or insignia to signify the *Sede Vacante*. This symbol is used in place of the papal coat of arms, which is selected by each Pope. The different coats shown below illustrate the coat of arms of the Holy See, papal coats of arms, as well as the symbol used during the period of transition. The insignia used for the period of the *Sede Vacante* depicts two keys symbolic of the keys of the Kingdom given to Peter. However there is no miter or tiara over the keys; instead, the *umbraculum* (little umbrella) is depicted. The *umbraculum* was used in the past to offer shade to the Pope when he walked outdoors. Once a Pope is elected, he chooses a particular coat of arms which is based on the Holy See Coat of Arms.



Sede Vacante Insignia



Sede Vacante Insignia (as depicted in Vatican website)



Holy See Coat of Arms



Benedict XVI's Coat of Arms



John Paul II's Coat of Arms

The Conclave

The Historical Process of Papal Election

A quick review of the history of the Church tells that until the 4th century, the election of a Pope followed the process, particular of that historical time, for the election of any bishop. During those days, bishops of the area, Roman clergymen, and laity participated in the papal election. From the 4th to the 11th century, noble families and emperors influenced the election. However, in 1059, Pope Nicholas II issued a decree, *In nomine domini*, stating that only Cardinal bishops would meet in Rome to discuss candidates for the papacy, who would preferentially be chosen from the Roman clergy; still the approval of the rest of the clergy and laity was sought.¹³ The Second Lateran Council of 1139 stated that the election of the Pope would be the exclusive privilege of the Cardinals.¹⁴

In 1179, at the Third Lateran Council, Pope Alexander III decreed that a two-thirds majority vote was necessary to elect the Pope.¹⁵ This council however, did not give any instructions regarding the possibility of not reaching this majority. This occurred after the death of Clement IV in 1268, where the *Sede Vacante* lasted for two years and nine months. The townspeople of Viterbo, where the election was taking place, were frustrated with the lack of results in spite the length of time which had elapsed and walled up the meeting place. The Cardinals were not permitted any contact with the outside; food was delivered to them. At some point, the people removed the roof of the meeting place, thus exposing the electors to the elements.

The Second Council of Lyon in 1274 addressed this matter and decreed that the cardinals would meet in isolation from the rest of the world. If the Cardinals did not reach a majority vote in three days, their food supply would diminish and be restricted even further if after an additional five days the majority vote had not yet been attained.¹⁶

¹³ *In nomine domini* – Papal Bull by Pope Nicholas II, issued in 1059.

http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/01p/1059-04-12,_SS_Nicholaus_II,_Bulla_'In_Nomine_Domine'_%5BPapal_Version%5D,_EN.pdf

See also “Papal Elections” in *Catholic Encyclopedia* <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11456a.htm>

¹⁴ “Papal Elections” in *Catholic Encyclopedia* <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11456a.htm>

¹⁵ Third Lateran Council - 1179 A.D – canon # 1. In Papal Encyclicals Online <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Councils/ecum11.htm>

¹⁶ “Papal Elections” in *Catholic Encyclopedia* <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11456a.htm>

Place of the Conclave

The word *conclave* (Latin *cum clave* – with key) originates from the sequestration of the Cardinal electors which was the practice following the instructions of the Second Council of Lyon in 1274. In present day language, *Conclave* refers both to the College of Cardinals meeting to elect the Pope, and to the space where the meeting will be conducted.

The Conclave takes place in the Sistine Chapel and the Cardinal electors reside in the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*; this residence is adjacent to St. Peter's Basilica. The Camerlengo has the duty to assure privacy of the Cardinal electors during the Conclave.¹⁷ In addition to the Cardinals, only a few individuals are given permission and approval, from the Camerlengo and his three Assistants, to be lodged near the Conclave: the Secretary of the College of Cardinals (Archbishop Lorenzo Baldisseri), the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations (Monsignor Guido Marini), two Masters of Ceremonies, two Papal Sacristans; a few priests available for confessions, and two medical doctors.¹⁸

Time of the Conclave

According to the instructions set forth in *Universi Dominici Gregis*, the Cardinal electors would begin the Conclave after waiting fifteen days from the time the Apostolic See became vacant. It had also been declared that after having waited twenty days since the vacancy, those Cardinals present had to begin the Conclave, even if all the electors were not present.¹⁹ However, Pope Benedict XVI, in his Apostolic Letter *Normas Nonnullas*, provided a modification to the above mentioned norm, and declared that if all the Cardinal electors were present, the College of Cardinals can begin the Conclave without waiting the full fifteen days of vacancy.²⁰

Noting this modification, on March 8, during the 7th General Congregation, the Cardinal Dean, Angelo Sodano, explained that the Conclave could start soon. Later in the afternoon of March 8th, during the 8th General Congregation, the Cardinal Dean proposed that the Conclave start on Tuesday March 12th. The proposal was accepted by majority.²¹

¹⁷ *Universi Dominici Gregis* # 43

¹⁸ *Universi Dominici Gregis* # 46

¹⁹ *Universi Dominici Gregis* # 37

²⁰ *Normas Nonnullas* #37

²¹ Briefing of the 8th General Congregation, <http://attualita.vatican.va/sala-stampa/bollettino/2013/03/08/news/30606.html>

Cardinal Electors

Every member of the College of Cardinals is not able to cast a vote. Only those cardinals who have not reached their 80th birthday, before the Apostolic See vacancy begins, have the privilege of voting. The maximum number of Cardinal electors cannot exceed one hundred and twenty.²² Presently, there are 117 Cardinal electors; of those 50 were named Cardinal by John Paul II and 67 by Benedict XVI.²³ All the Cardinal electors are required to attend the Conclave, unless excused by illness or a grave impediment; any absence must be approved by the College of Cardinals.²⁴ The current conclave will have 115 Cardinal electors present. On March 8, during the 7th General Congregation, the College of Cardinals accepted the reasons excusing the two Cardinals who would be absent: “Cardinal Julius Riyadi Darmaatmadja, S.J., for health reasons, and Cardinal Keith O’Brien, for personal reasons.”²⁵

The geographical distribution of the 117 Cardinal electors is as follows²⁶:

- 61 from Europe
- 14 from North America (11 from the United States²⁷ and 3 from Canada)
- 19 from Latin America
- 11 from Africa
- 11 from Asia
- 1 from Oceania

²² *Universi Dominici Gregis* # 33

²³ Statistics on the College of Cardinals – Holy See Press Office

http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/documentazione/documents/cardinali_statistiche/cardinali_statistiche_prospetto_en.html

²⁴ *Universi Dominici Gregis* # 38

²⁵ Briefing on the 7th General Congregation, <http://attualita.vatican.va/sala-stampa/bollettino/2013/03/08/news/30606.html>

²⁶ Statistics on the College of Cardinals – Holy See Press Office

http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/documentazione/documents/cardinali_statistiche/cardinali_statistiche_continenti_en.html

²⁷ See appendix for a list of United States Cardinals and their current assignments

The Beginning of the Conclave

The Conclave officially begins when the Cardinal electors gather at St. Peter's Basilica to celebrate a Votive Mass, *Pro eligendo Papa*, invoking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the task that awaits them. This generally occurs on the morning of the fifteenth day, but not later than the twentieth day, following the vacancy in the Apostolic See. As previously indicated, during the 8th General Congregation, it was decided that the Conclave would start on March 12,²⁸ and thus at the 9th General Congregation, the following it was announced that the "*Pro eligendo Romano Pontifice*" Mass will be concelebrated by all the Cardinals at 10:00am (Rome time) on the morning March 12, and will be presided by the Cardinal Dean. It was also reported that the entry into the Sistine Chapel would take place on March 12 at 4:30pm (Rome time – 10:00am Eastern Standard Time).²⁹

The Cardinal electors will invoke the Holy Spirit, chanting *Veni Creator*, while they process from the Pauline Chapel to the Sistine Chapel where the election takes place. The Sistine Chapel will remain “with key” – “*cum clave*” until the conclusion of the election.³⁰ After all the Cardinal electors have arrived in the Sistine Chapel, they will take an oath. First the Dean will read the general oath, and then each Cardinal will take an individual oath.³¹

²⁸ Briefing of the 8th General Congregation, <http://attualita.vatican.va/sala-stampa/bollettino/2013/03/08/news/30606.html>

²⁹ Briefing of the 9th General Congregation, <http://attualita.vatican.va/sala-stampa/bollettino/2013/03/09/news/30609.html>

³⁰ *Universi Dominici Gregis* #50-51

³¹ This is the oath taken by the Cardinal electors after they have arrived at the Sistine Chapel. *Universi Dominici Gregis* #53

We, the Cardinal electors present in this election of the Supreme Pontiff promise, pledge and swear, as individuals and as a group, to observe faithfully and scrupulously the prescriptions contained in the Apostolic Constitution of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, Universi Dominici Gregis, published on 22 February 1996. We likewise promise, pledge and swear that whichever of us by divine disposition is elected Roman Pontiff will commit himself faithfully to carrying out the munus Petrinum of Pastor of the Universal Church and will not fail to affirm and defend strenuously the spiritual and temporal rights and the liberty of the Holy See. In a particular way, we promise and swear to observe with the greatest fidelity and with all persons, clerical or lay, secrecy regarding everything that in any way relates to the election of the Roman Pontiff and regarding what occurs in the place of the election, directly or indirectly related to the results of the voting; we promise and swear not to break this secret in any way, either during or after the election of the new Pontiff, unless explicit authorization is granted by the same Pontiff; and never to lend support or favour to any interference, opposition or any other form of intervention, whereby secular authorities of whatever order and degree or any group of people or individuals might wish to intervene in the election of the Roman Pontiff.

Then, each of the Cardinal electors, will say the following,

And I, N. Cardinal N., do so promise, pledge and swear, [as he places his hand on the Gospels, he will continue] So help me God and these Holy Gospels which I touch with my hand.

Once all the Cardinal electors have taken the oath, the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations (Monsignor Guido Marini) will give the order *Extra omnes*. At that point all those who are not taking part in the Conclave will leave the Sistine Chapel. In addition to the electors, only the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations and the cleric previously chosen to give the second meditation can stay in the Chapel.³²

The Election

Voting can begin after the Sistine Chapel has been secured. John Paul II, in his Apostolic Constitution *Universi Dominici Gregis*, affirmed that former ways of election, such as acclamation or delegation had been abolished and that only election by secret ballot, or scrutiny is permitted.³³ Before the voting begins a group of nine Cardinals is selected by lot to assist with the process:³⁴

- Three *Scrutineers* will count the votes.
- Three *Infirmarii* will distribute and collect ballots from Cardinals who are too sick to cast the vote on their own and/or unable to leave St. Martha's house.
- Three *Revisers* will double check the counting carried out by the Scrutineers

If voting starts on the afternoon of the first day, only one ballot can take place. On the following days of the Conclave, two ballots can be held in the morning and two in the afternoon.³⁵ If any Cardinal elector should write down more than one name in the ballot, the ballot will be considered null.³⁶ Each Cardinal elector, in order of seniority, will carry the folded ballot to the altar and before placing the ballot in the receptacle will say, “*I call as my witness Christ the Lord who will be my judge, that my vote is given to the one who before God I think should be elected.*”³⁷ The unopened ballots will be counted by the Scrutineers; if the ballots do not correspond to the number of Cardinal electors, the ballots will be burned and a new vote taken. However, if the number of ballots and electors coincide, the ballots will be opened and counted. The results will then be verified by the Revisers.³⁸

³² *Universi Dominici Gregis* #52

³³ *Universi Dominici Gregis*, #62

³⁴ *Universi Dominici Gregis*, #64

³⁵ *Universi Dominici Gregis*, #63

³⁶ *Universi Dominici Gregis*, #65

³⁷ *Universi Dominici Gregis*, #66

³⁸ *Universi Dominici Gregis*, #68-70

The Results of the Each Ballot are Announced

After the ballots are counted and the results verified, the ballots will be burned by the Scrutineers. If majority was not obtained, a second vote will take place immediately. In this case, the ballots from the first vote will be burned with the ballots from the second vote.³⁹ The burning of the ballots is done in a furnace in the Sistine Chapel. On Saturday March 9th, a chimney was installed on the roof of the Sistine Chapel,⁴⁰ so that the smoke *-fumata-* will be clearly visible in St. Peter's Square.

The result of the election is announced with the color of the smoke produced. Prior to 1978, damp straw was added to the ballots to produce black smoke, which indicated an inconclusive vote had taken place; dry straw was added to produce white smoke, which communicated a majority was reached and a Pope was elected. In the elections of 1978 (Pope John Paul II elected) and 2005 (Pope Benedict elected), special chemicals replaced the straw to produce the desired color in the smoke.⁴¹

The New Pope

After a two-thirds majority has been attained, the junior Cardinal Deacon summons the Secretary of the College of Cardinals and the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations. The Dean of the College, representing all the Cardinal electors, asks the consent of the one chosen, with these words, *“Do you accept your canonical election as Supreme Pontiff?”* Immediately after receiving consent, the Dean continues, *“By what name do you wish to be called?”* The Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations, acting as notary, and the two Masters of Ceremonies, acting as witnesses write a document which certifies the acceptance of the election by the new Pope and state the name to be taken.⁴²

In the rare occurrence that the newly elected is not already a bishop, he will receive Episcopal Ordination immediately by the Dean or most senior Cardinal. In theory any baptized Catholic man in good standing can be elected Pope, but this has not occurred in a long time. Cardinal Mauro Alberto Cappellari, a Camaldolese monk, who was not a bishop, and served as the Prefect of the former

³⁹ *Universi Dominici Gregis*, #70

⁴⁰ Briefing of the 9th General Congregation, <http://attualita.vatican.va/sala-stampa/bollettino/2013/03/09/news/30609.html>

⁴¹ Papal Transitions, USCCB, p. 8, 2013.

⁴² *Universi Dominici Gregis*, #87

Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, was elected in 1831 and took the name Gregory XVI. In the 11th century, in the midst of great rivalry between Roman noble families, three laymen were elected Pope: Benedict VIII (1012-24); John XIX (1024-32); and Benedict IX (1032-44; 1045; 1047-48).⁴³

It will take a few hours from the time the white smoke appeared to the time the new Pope appears in the balcony of St. Peter Basilica. During that time the new Bishop of Rome changes into the traditional white vestments and returns to the Sistine Chapel to greet the Cardinal electors and receive a sign of their obedience.

The New Pope is Presented to the World

The Senior Cardinal Deacon, currently French Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, will present the new Pope from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, with these words, "*Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum. Habemus Papam.*" [*"I announce a great joy to you. We have a Pope!"*]. The new Pope then immediately will impart the Apostolic Blessing *Urbi et Orbi*.⁴⁴

⁴³ Papal Transitions, USCCB, p. 9, 2013.

⁴⁴ *Universi Dominici Gregis*, #89

APPENDIX

Cardinals Electors of the United States

- Cardinal Raymond Leo **Burke** - Cardinal Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura 2008-present
Archbishop of St. Louis 2003-2008
- Cardinal Daniel Nicholas **DiNardo**, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston 2006-present
- Cardinal Timothy Michael **Dolan**, Archbishop of New York 2009-present
President USCCB 2010-present
- Cardinal Francis Eugene **George** OMI, Archbishop of Chicago 1997-present
- Cardinal James Michael **Harvey**, Archpriest of St. Paul Outside the Walls 2012-present
Prefect of the Papal Household 1998-2012
- Cardinal William Joseph **Levada**, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2005-2012 / Prefect Emeritus 2012-
- Cardinal Roger Michael **Mahoney**, Archbishop of Los Angeles 1985-2011 / Archbishop Emeritus 2011-present
- Cardinal Edwin Frederick **O'Brien**, Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem 2012-present
Archbishop of Baltimore 2007-2011
Archbishop for the Military Services 1997-2007
- Cardinal Sean Patrick **O'Malley** OFM Cap., Archbishop of Boston 2003-present
- Cardinal Justin Francis **Rigali**, Archbishop of Philadelphia 2003-2011 / Archbishop Emeritus of Philadelphia 2011-present
Archbishop 1994-2003
- Cardinal Donald William **Wuerl** Archbishop of Washington DC 2006-present

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