

What Happens Next: After the Pope Dies

A guide for college campus ministers and their communities during Sede Vacante.

A TIME OF MOURNING: Sede Vacante Begins

1

When the Holy Father dies, the Church enters a sacred time of mourning and transition.

As college campus ministers, this is a profound opportunity to accompany students in prayer, teach about the beauty of our Church's tradition, and model hope in Christ.

- Sede Vacante means "the seat is vacant." This marks the time between popes.
- The Camerlengo (a Vatican official) confirms the pope's death and secures his rooms and papers.
- The pope's ring (Fisherman's Ring) is destroyed—symbolizing the end of his authority.
- The Church enters a nine-day mourning period (Novemdiales), with Masses and prayers offered for the repose of the pope's soul.
- Flags are lowered, and the bronze doors of St. Peter's are closed in reverence.

As we pray for the repose of Pope Francis' soul, may this moment invite deeper formation, conversation, and unity among students.

College campus ministers have a vital role in helping the next generation understand the beauty and continuity of the Catholic Church.

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

- The College of Cardinals governs day-to-day Church functions—but cannot make major decisions.
- The Camerlengo coordinates logistics and funeral preparations.
- Many Vatican roles pause until a new pope is elected.

THE CONCLAVE: Choosing a New Pope

2

- Cardinals under age 80 travel to Rome. They have 15-20 days to arrive.
- All cardinals meet in daily gatherings to plan and pray before the election.
- Voting begins in the Sistine Chapel—2 votes in the morning, 2 in the afternoon.
- A 2/3 majority is required to elect the next pope.
- Black smoke = No decision yet.
- White smoke = A pope has been chosen!

HABEMUS PAPAM!

3

- The elected cardinal accepts and chooses a papal name.
- The Cardinal Protodeacon steps onto the balcony:
- "Habemus Papam!" — "We have a pope!"
- The new pope appears to give his Urbi et Orbi blessing — "to the city and to the world."