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Talk in Rome turns to new cardinals in 2010

John L. Allen Jr. | Feb. 8, 2010 NCR Today

[updated]

tDespite a recent boomlet of conjecture about a consistory in late February or early March, the consensus in Rome these days seems to be that Pope Benedict XVI isn?t likely to create new cardinals until sometime later in 2010, perhaps as late as November. Between now and then, several other major events loom on the pope?s calendar: Trips to Malta in April, Portugal (Fatima) in May, Cyprus in June and the United Kingdom in September, as well as a Synod of Bishops for the Middle East in October.

tAs of today, there are a total of 182 cardinals, of whom 111 are under the age of 80 and hence eligible to vote for the next pope. In March, three more cardinals will turn 80, followed by one each in July and August, three more in September, and one each in October and November. Hence if Benedict XVI waits until November, there would be at least 19 slots for new voting cardinals ? presuming, as most do, that Benedict intends to honor the limit of 120 set by Pope Paul VI.

tTwo of the ten cardinals who will ?age out? in coming months, by the way, are Americans: Theodore McCarrick of Washington and Adam Maida of Detroit, both now retired.

tWhile popes are free to make anyone they want a cardinal, in general the bulk of these nominations are fairly predictable, since there are certain jobs in the church with which a cardinal?s ?red hat? is more or less automatically associated. Given that the last consistory came in November 2007, the list of these ?cardinals in waiting? has become fairly long.

tFor the moment, that list among residential prelates would include:

?tArchbishop Paolo Romeo, Palermo, Italy
?tArchbishop Giuseppe Bettori, Florence, Italy
?tArchbishop André-Joseph Léonard, Brussels, Belgium
?tArchbishop Vincent Nichols, Westminster, Great Britain
?tArchbishop Timothy Dolan, New York
?tArchbishop Donald Wuerl, Washington, D.C.
?tArchbishop Orani João Tempesta, Rio de Janiero, Brazil
?tArchbishop Braulio Rodr'guez Plaza, Toledo, Spain
?tArchbishop Carlos Osoro Sierra, Valencia, Spain
?tArchbishop Juan José Asenjo Pelegrina, Seville, Spain
?tArchbishop Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij, Bangkok, Thailand
?tArchbishop Joseph Ngô Quang Kiêt, Ha Noi, Vietnam
?tArchbishop Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo
?tArchbishop Kazimierz Nycz, Warsaw, Poland
?tArchbishop Willem Jacobus Eijk, Utrecht, The Netherlands
?tArchbishop Reinhard Marx, Munich and Freising, Germany

? Archbishop Thomas Collins, Toronto, Canada
[Note: Collins of Toronto was ommited in the original post.]

There?s also a slew of Vatican officials in a holding pattern to join the College of Cardinals, including:

?tArchbishop Angelo Amato, Congregation for the Causes of Saints
?tArchbishop Velasio De Paolis, Prefecture for the Economic Affairs of the Holy See
?tArchbishop Raymond Burke, Apostolic Signatura
?tArchbishop Fortunato Baldelli, Apostolic Penitentiary
?tArchbishop Gianfranco Ravasi, Pontifical Council for Culture
?tArchbishop Antonio Maria Vegliò, Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant Peoples
?tArchbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers
?tArchbishop Francesco Monterisi, Archpriest of the Basilica of St. Paul outside the Walls

Adding them all up, that?s twenty-five potential cardinals, all of whom hold positions that carry a reasonable expectation of one day becoming a cardinal. That?s not even allowing for the possibility that Benedict XVI may want to bestow the red hat upon a deserving diocese that?s not traditionally had one, as he did last time by elevating Daniel Di Nardo of Houston. Candidates this time around might include: Colombo, Sri Lanka, where Archbishop Albert Malcolm Ranjith is a longtime friend and collaborator of the pope; perhaps the new Archbishop of Port-au-Prince in Haiti, as a gesture of solidarity to that devastated nation; or somewhere in Africa, as a recognition of the phenomenal growth on the faith on that continent.

The total of twenty-four also does not account for the likelihood that Benedict XVI will have to make some additional high-profile Vatican appointments throughout 2010, including successors to cardinals who are already past 75 but still in charge of important offices such as the Congregations for Bishops, Clergy and Religious, as well as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. If the new heads of these offices are not already cardinals, they too will claim a place in line.

Given the math, it seems likely that some of these ?cardinals in waiting? may have to wait a bit more ? for example, in a case in which the retired cardinal is still around and still active, or a case such as Spain in which naming three new cardinals at once might seem excessive.

In terms of the United States, three names may seem conspicuous by their absence from the list of ?cardinals in waiting?: the recently appointed archbishops of Baltimore, Detroit and St. Louis, all three archdioceses which at one point or another were considered ?red hat? assignments. The consensus wisdom, however, is that since the United States is already over-represented in the College of Cardinals (the U.S. is only the fourth largest Catholic country in the world, but it has the second largest number of cardinals after the Italians), and given shifts in the Catholic population in America, those three dioceses may well no longer be led by cardinals.

If Benedict XVI feels he has to choose which new American cardinal to name first ? New York or Washington ? many observers believe it will be Dolan in New York. Strictly speaking, Wuerl in Washington has been in the queue longer, but New York is among that handful of ?mega-dioceses? around the world ? meaning large, highly visible dioceses, considered crucial for the country and the region ? where the Vatican typically wants a cardinal to be at the helm.

Moreover, Washington is also an unusual case in that not just one, but two, emeritus cardinals are still in the background: McCarrick and William Baum, now 83. On the other hand, given Benedict XVI?s affection for the United States, it?s possible that the next consistory could include at least three Americans: Dolan, Wuerl, and Burke.

Benedict?s last consistory came in November 2007, when he named 18 new voting cardinals as well as five

?honorary? cardinals, meaning figures already over the age of 80. The latter are sometimes the most interesting, if only because they?re the least predictable, not being tethered to any particular diocese or Vatican position.

One wild-card possibility this time around: Fr. Peter Hans Kolvenbach, the former Superior General of the Jesuits, who will be 82 on Nov. 30. It?s well known around Rome that Kolvenbach and then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger enjoyed a close personal relationship, and given Benedict?s efforts to heal the perceived breach between the papacy and the church?s flagship religious order, this might be another way of extending an olive branch. It?s a bit dicey, because Jesuits are not supposed to seek ecclesiastical honors, but of course John Paul II made various Jesuits cardinals, and Benedict XVI has included one Jesuit among the non-voting cardinals in each of his two consistories: Albert Vanhoye, former secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, in 2006, and Urbano Navarrete Cortés, former rector of the Gregorian University, in 2007.

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