NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Pope's resignation lands Vatican in uncharted territory

Alessandro Speciale Religion News Service | Feb. 13, 2013
Benedict Resigns
Vatican City

Still reeling from Monday's announcement that Pope Benedict XVI will become the first pope in 600 years to resign, the Vatican is attempting to return to normal, but many questions about the future remain unanswered.

"I don't know" was the most common response from the Vatican's top spokesman, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, at a press conference Tuesday as he was peppered with questions about everything from what Benedict will be called in retirement, to whether he will still be a cardinal, to who will live with him in his retirement inside a Vatican convent.

The Vatican, an institution bound up in centuries of tradition, is facing the unprecedented reality of having two popes living at the same time, and Lombardi frankly admitted that the Vatican is still working out the details on many unresolved issues.

According to Edward Peters, a blogger and expert in church governance, while canon law explicitly allows the possibility of a papal resignation, what it doesn't "treat of -- and has not experienced for nearly 600 years -- is the status of a former pope."

For instance, it is not clear what Benedict's status and role will be inside the Vatican and within the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Will he be called "bishop emeritus" of Rome, as normally happens for retired bishops, or will a new title be devised for him?

Formally, the pope is still the bishop of the Eternal City, but Peters stressed that, with his Feb. 28 resignation, Benedict will relinquish "the distinguishable but inseparable offices of the papacy and the bishopric of Rome, so, effective the evening of February 28, he will hold neither office."

Similarly, a highly symbolic question lingers over the fate of traditional insignia of papal power, such as the papal seal or the Fisherman's Ring that are usually destroyed after a pope's death.

Then there is the question of whether Benedict will take part in Vatican rites -- such as the installation ceremony for his successor -- as is customary for other retired churchmen who reside in Vatican City. It's a significant question because any gesture from the retired pope might risk overshadowing his successor's work and authority.

"Even if his decision has been taken a while ago, I think it will take time and tranquility for the pope to reflect on how to live in his new condition," Lombardi answered.

Nevertheless, the Vatican spokesman was adamant in affirming that Benedict will keep a low profile and will "not intervene in any way in the process" of electing his successor. "He is a very discreet person," he said.

Benedict will settle in a small cloistered convent inside the Vatican walls, where Lombardi said renovations to

prepare for the pope's arrival started in the fall after the last group of nuns left the building.

The Vatican spokesman also confirmed that Benedict underwent "routine surgery" about three months ago to replace batteries in his pacemaker, but denied it was in any way connected with Benedict's decision to step down.

The Vatican's semiofficial newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, reported Monday that Benedict's decision was taken about a year ago, after an exhausting trip to Mexico and Cuba in March 2012.

In his last two weeks as pope, Benedict will keep his usual schedule, meeting with heads of state and bishops from all over the world, and there will be no special farewell event, Lombardi said.

Source URL (retrieved on *07/14/2014 - 10:23*): http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/popes-resignation-lands-vatican-uncharted-territory