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Pope gets retirement title, focuses on prayer

Joshua J. McElwee | Feb. 26, 2013 NCR Today
Benedict Resigns
Rome

In his final days as the leader of the Catholic church, Pope Benedict XVI is focusing on prayer and is taking few audiences, the Vatican spokesman said Tuesday.

He is also packing up his belongings and preparing to move to Castel Gandolfo, a small Italian town southeast of Rome, said Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi.

When his resignation takes effect at 8 p.m. Rome time Thursday, Lombardi said, the Swiss Guards will no longer protect the pontiff, as they are charged with guarding only the pope.

At that time, Lombardi said, Benedict's official title will be "His Holiness Benedict XVI, Roman pontiff emeritus."

Lombardi said the pope will continue to wear a white cassock, but no longer will be seen in red shoes. Instead, the pope has decided to wear a pair of brown shoes given to him on the 2012 papal visit to Mexico.

His fisherman's ring, which contains the pope's formal seal, will also be destroyed.

?It will be broken at a particular moment, when that will happen is up to the college of cardinals," said Basilian Fr. Thomas Rosica, who provided English translation of the press conference.

Rosica also said the decisions regarding the retired pope's title and clothing were made by Benedict, "but obviously he would have discussed those with other people around him.?

Lombardi also said Tuesday that a formal letter calling the church's cardinals to meet to elect a new pope will be sent March 1, the day after Pope Benedict's resignation.

After release of that letter, the cardinals are expected to meet several times together before they enter the conclave, or the secret meeting in which they will elect the pope's successor. It is likely, Lombardi said, that the cardinals will not meet for the first time until Monday, March 4.

With several meetings of cardinals expected before the conclave, that timeline may upset some cardinals who have publicly stated they're looking for the conclave to start earlier than normal.

While the beginning of a conclave is governed by church law, and laid out in detail in Pope John Paul II's 1996 constitution *Universi Dominici gregis, t*he Vatican announced Monday that Benedict had given the college of cardinals authority to set the beginning date of the conclave on their own.

115 cardinals are expected to participate in the vote to determine the next pontiff. While all cardinals under the age of 80 -- numbering 117 -- are allowed by church law to take part, two eligible cardinals have announced

they are not coming.

One, Indonesian Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja, has said he cannot participate because of poor health and loss of vision. Another, Scottish Cardinal Keith O'Brien, announced Monday he would not partake following allegations made against him of improper sexual relations with priests.

O'Brien, who the Vatican also announced Monday had resigned his post as archbishop of Saint Andrews and Edinburgh, has denied the allegations through a spokesperson.

Rosica said Monday Pope Benedict had meant to approve O'Brien's resignation earlier, but "because of the date of the pope's resignation, some things were held up a bit."

"Our role here is simply to confirm the resignation," Rosica said then. "We do not comment on other stories, or things you may have heard."

[Joshua J. McElwee is an *NCR* staff writer. He is also tweeting from events at the Vatican during the papal transition. Be sure to sign up to follow his Twitter feed at **twitter.com/joshjmac** [1].]

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