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Cardinals meet; Vatican gives no comment on Scottish scandal

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Conclave 2013
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The Vatican announced Monday that 142 cardinals were present for the first meeting of the college of cardinals following the Thursday resignation of Pope Benedict XVI.

The meeting of cardinals was the first of several expected this week before the cardinals enter the secret meeting where they will elect the now-retired pope's successor, who will lead the 1.2 billion members of the Roman Catholic Church.

Throughout the morning, journalists and tourists in Rome had gathered outside the Paul VI Hall, where the cardinals are meeting in General Congregation, to watch the prelates come and go.

As the cardinals walked in, some stopped to say a word or two, but most kept quiet. Each cardinal carried a small black briefcase emblazoned with a golden seal of the special *sede vacante* period and the year 2013.

The meeting this morning, said Vatican spokesperson Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, began with several prayers, including the "Veni Sanctus Spiritus." Each of the cardinals then took an oath on the Bible to keep the contents of the meetings secret at pain of excommunication.

Three cardinals -- Giovanni Battista Re, Crescenzio Sepe and Franc Rode -- were chosen by lot to help assist in the general functioning of the church in the time before the election of the new pope.

Together, the cardinals also decided to write a letter to now-Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, who is living at Castel Gandolfo during the conclave process.

The meeting, said Basilian Fr. Thomas Rosica, was "extremely cordial, warm, [and] fraternal." The cardinals, he said, have "deep concern for the needs of the church throughout the world."

The cardinals are expected to meet again Monday afternoon. They are to partake in a spiritual meditation led by Capuchin Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, who has served as the preacher of the papal household since 1980.

In 2006, Cantalamessa gained attention when he asked then-Pope Benedict to consider declaring a day of fasting and penitence for the sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests.

Vatican spokespersons were asked several times during Monday's briefing to elaborate on the Vatican's response to Scottish Cardinal Keith O'Brien, who said on Sunday [1] he had had improper sexual contact with priests.

One Scottish reporter said the Scottish "are not very happy" with the explanation of O'Brien's resignation, asking what additional disciplinary action might be taken by the Vatican.

In response, Rosica read aloud from O'Brien's statement Sunday, adding, "That's all we can say. That's what's been said."

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