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Cardinals should use, not shun, media before conclave

by Isabella R. Moyer

NCR Today

Conclave 2013

Contrary to popular belief, cardinals do not enter the Sistine Chapel to find the Holy Spirit waiting for them with an exclusive infusion of wisdom. There is little chance that the name of the next pope will miraculously appear from the heavens. We believe that the Holy Spirit works collaboratively with human nature, and often, that collaboration requires hard work on our part. Austen Ivereigh's *Tablet* article, "Selecting a pope -- the process," describes the very human dialogue already taking place among the cardinals both before and during the conclave.

Some think this dialogue should remain exclusive. The Secretariat of State published a communiqué on Feb. 23 criticizing the media and others for attempting to influence the cardinals before the conclave begins.

Through the course of the centuries, Cardinals have had to face many forms of pressures exerted upon individual electors or on the College of Cardinals. Such pressures had as their goal to condition the decisions, following a political or worldly logic.

If in the past, the so-called powers, i.e., States, exerted pressures on the election of the Pope, today there is an attempt to do this through public opinion that is often based on judgements that do not typically capture the spiritual aspect of the moment that the Church is living.

Any discernment process entails that we listen carefully to the voices around us, for God may be speaking through others. It also calls us to observe carefully, to read the signs of the times. And, yes, it requires bringing all that we have collected into prayerful pondering to seek God's will.

It is incredibly naïve to think the media can be silenced. The events of these past days are big news not

only for the church, but for the world. Is this a good time for scandals to appear? Of course not, but it certainly isn't the time to try to put a lid on a simmering pot. Have we learned nothing about the need for transparency in a crisis?

As to influencing cardinals, they need to know who they are voting for, and we need to know who is being considered, skeletons and all. Thanks to John Allen here at *NCR*, we're getting a daily look at the *papabili*. His in-depth profiles are like a mini "who's who" course in church leadership. The knowledge he is sharing will be valuable not only as the new pope is named, but also as a new Curia is appointed.

You can bet most cardinals are turning to the media for the latest news, collecting all the information they can. I hope they are also arriving in Rome with an acute awareness of the deep needs and desires of the people they serve. I hope they have already engaged in effective and respectful dialogue at local and national levels.

I hope they are reading blogs, Twitter feeds, commentaries and discussion boards. We may not have an electoral vote, but the people of God have a voice as in no other time in history. Through social media, we are making known the "joy and hope, the grief and anguish" of women and men of our time (*Gaudium et Spes I*).

The cardinals must bring the voice of the people into their conclave dialogue. After all, cardinals are not choosing a pope for themselves. They are choosing a pope for the church.

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