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US prelates' silence shifts focus to finance, national disputes

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Conclave 2013
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Impose silence, and it seems a press secretary gets more questions he'd rather not have been asked.

The Vatican's daily press briefing Thursday about the cardinals' meeting covered financial and governance matters and even the role women play in conclave preparations, but questions kept coming back to one topic: Why were a series of popular briefings given by the U.S. cardinals canceled?

The cardinals met Thursday for the fifth time since Pope Benedict XVI's resignation. They are meeting daily before entering the conclave.

While a spokesperson for the U.S. bishop' conference said Wednesday [1] the Americans canceled their briefings because of concerns of leaks of confidential information in the Italian media, those leaks continued Thursday.

Several Italian papers Thursday carried detailed reports, attributed to confidential sources, of what happened in Wednesday's meeting, including which cardinals had spoken, what they had said, and whether they broke a five-minute limit on talks.

The continued leaking of information has led some to conclude that the Italian cardinals, many of whom served in Pope Benedict's Curia, prefer their version of events from the congregation meetings to be printed rather than the Americans' version.

One Italian story addressing the situation from *La Stampa*'s Vatican Insider ran with the headline: "Curia silences U.S. cardinals: 'You talk too much.' "

Asked pointedly at the briefing "why Americans were doing penance for the Italian cardinals," Basilian Fr. Thomas Rosica, who is providing English translation for the briefings, said it was "not up to" the Vatican spokesmen to settle potential disputes between national conferences.

"If someone knows who leaked the information ... it would be good to tell us or make it known to others," Rosica said. "If they're wrongly disseminating information, that is on their conscience."

The cardinals Thursday also received a report from the three in their rank most responsible for the Vatican's purse strings and internal affairs.

No date has been set yet for the conclave, Vatican spokesman Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi said.

"Because of the seriousness, the nature of the conclave, and the huge responsibility placed on the shoulders of the cardinals," they need time to discuss before they can have the vote, Rosica said.

One reporter asked about a video shown Wednesday of the preparations being made for the Sistine Chapel that showed a woman sewing cloth hangings for the chapel's walls and asked if women were involved with the conclave in other ways.

"There could be other women involved in the whole preparation for the conclave, in serving the fathers" at their hotels, Rosica said.

The Sistine Chapel is where the cardinals will cast their ballots for the next pope once they enter the conclave. In a series of videos over the last few days, the Vatican has shown workers preparing the chapel for the event, installing a raised floor to accommodate cardinals with disabilities and covering its windows with film to prevent outsiders from looking in.

A video Thursday also showed gardeners working to destroy a flower bed in the Vatican gardens arranged in the coat of arms of Pope Benedict.

Hours before the Vatican's Thursday briefing, a U.S.-based group for abuse survivors asked the cardinals to consider as pope three archbishops they say have good records on abuse issues.

The three supported by the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests: Filipino Luis Tagle, Irish Diarmuid Martin, and Austrian Christoph Schönborn.

Calling Martin, who is not a cardinal and therefore not part of the meetings to elect the next pontiff, an "extreme long shot," SNAP director David Clohessy said nonetheless the Irish prelate has proved he "has some courage" regarding sex abuse issues.

Martin, the archbishop of Dublin since 2004, has been noted for his frank responses to government investigations into priest abuse, for criticizing Irish bishops on the matter, and for releasing church files to investigators quickly.

As the cardinals continue to discuss Thursday their considerations for the next pontiff in Rome, female victims of clergy sexual assault will be bringing their voices to the United Nations in New York.

Several victims are expected to testify Thursday before the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women, which is developing global standards for preventing violence against women.

At each of the cardinals' general meetings, the prelates are free to address the group on any issue. Sixteen such addresses were made Thursday, Rosica said, with the first three being those on Vatican governance and finances, as required by Pope John Paul II's 1988 apostolic constitution *Pastor Bonus*.

Rosica said the cardinals also discussed what they are looking for in the next pope -- "what is required, the talents required, the characteristics and the qualities."

The three prelates who issued reports on the Vatican's finances and governance were cardinals Giuseppe Versaldi, Giuseppe Bertello and Domenico Calcagno.

Respectively, the three were formerly President of the Prefecture for the Economic Affairs of the Holy See; President of the Pontifical Commission for Vatican City State and President of the Governorate of Vatican City State; and President of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See.

Rosica said Thursday 152 cardinals have now arrived in Rome to attend the daily meetings, among them 114 of the 115 expected to cast ballots for the next pope.

The last cardinal elector expected, Jean-Baptiste Pham Minh Man from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, was to arrive Thursday afternoon and may join the day's afternoon session, Rosica said.

The cardinals Thursday also elected three in their ranks to assist Tarcisio Bertone with daily governance of the Holy See during the time without a pope.

Formerly the Vatican's secretary of state, Bertone serves as the Vatican's acting head of state during the time between popes.

The three chosen to assist him were Lebanon Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros al-Rahi, Congo Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya and Italian Cardinal Velasio de Paolis. They will serve a term of three days, after which the cardinals will elect three others.

Rosica said the cardinals are expected to meet again Thursday afternoon, but he did not expect them to set a date for the conclave.

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