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

Catholics can learn from how Coptic popes are elected

Maureen Fiedler
| Mar. 7, 2013
NCR Today

This week on Interfaith Voices, we decided to find out how religious traditions other than Catholicism choose their top leaders. Many traditions, like Jews and Muslims, of course, don't have "top" leaders at the international level.

But two who do are Coptic Orthodox Christians and Tibetan Buddhists.

The selection of a new Dalai Lama for Tibetan Buddhists is not even remotely close to anything in Christianity. For the record, they search -- sometimes for years -- for a young boy who is the "reincarnation" of the previous Dalai Lama. They use signs and symbols to search him out. Fascinating, but not something we are likely to emulate.

Coptic Christians, on the other hand, have a process from which Catholics might learn a great deal. It features wide participation -- including laymen and laywomen -- in a fairly democratic electoral process.

To learn about this process, I interviewed Nelly van Doorn-Harder, professor of religion at Wake Forest University and co-author of *The Emergence of the Modern Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and its Leadership from the Ottoman Period to the Present.*

She said the process begins with a nominating committee composed of nine bishops and nine laypeople (including women) who select candidates. In the most recent selection in late 2012, they came up with 17 possibilities. Then an electoral college (sound familiar?) meets. It has more than 2,000 delegates: clergy, laymen and laywomen elected by their dioceses. Last time, they narrowed the field to five, then to three. The three names are then put in three small plastic "balls" and placed in a glass urn. Finally, a young, blindfolded boy -- about age 6 -- is selected to draw a name. The name drawn is the new Coptic pope.

Van Doorn-Harder tells me Copts have been pleased with the selections made this way, including their new pope, Theodoros II. He has a difficult job not only leading his church, but coping with the politics of Egypt, where the Coptic church is centered.

Hear the interview starting Friday at interfaithradio.org [1].

Source URL (retrieved on *10/22/2014 - 19:13*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/catholics-can-learn-how-coptic-popes-are-elected

Links:
[1] http://www.interfaithradio.org/