

NEW CONSISTORY: WHAT WILL THE COLLEGE OF CARDINALS LOOK LIKE?

Posted on June 11, 2022



Consistories usually take place in February, June, and November. This time, the pope stepped a little ahead of schedule, as if he wanted to anticipate and

name—as soon as possible—those who will compete for the election of his successor.

Category: [COMMENTARY](#)

Since his election in 2013, Pope Francis has been keen to keep an annual rhythm of creating cardinals, whereas his predecessors made appointments at much more irregular intervals. But the pope has broken the rule he set for himself only in 2021—to hold a consistory once a year—in the wake of the pandemic and its upheaval.

He has scheduled the next consistory for [27 August 2022](#), which will result in the creation of 21 new cardinals, including 16 electors.

Pope Francis is methodically seeking to erase the European preponderance in the College of Cardinals. Although the European majority persists, it is set to diminish in the future. In 2013, 51% of the cardinals who elected Pope Francis were European. Since then, the trend has reversed direction. In 2016, the 50% mark was passed by non-European cardinals, who now make up the majority.

The new consistory will lead to the creation of 2 cardinals for Africa, 6 for Asia, 4 for South America, and 1 for North America. Europe will benefit from 8 new cardinals.

Rumours are currently rife about a possible resignation of Pope Francis. At the beginning of his pontificate, he had declared that he was not opposed to the principle, and said that a resignation of the pope would eventually become something “normal.” Today, aged over 85, Pope Francis is suffering from numerous health problems and his persistent fatigue is no longer a secret. The decision to hold a consistory in August is a signal analysed by Vatican experts: it is not a typical month for this type of gathering, which usually takes place in February, June, and November. This year, the pope has stepped a little ahead of schedule, as if he wanted to anticipate and name, as soon as possible, those who will

compete for the election of his successor.

Among the newcomers are a wide variety of profiles. Not all of them are celebrities, or at least personalities widely known to Catholics. Some appointments are not surprising, and concern prelates at the head of congregations. For example, Archbishop Arthur Roche, head of the Congregation for Divine Worship, and Archbishop You Heung-Sik, head of the Congregation for the Clergy, have been promoted. Bishop Arthur Roche was one of the main architects of the *motu proprio Traditionis Custodes*. [He wrote a particularly restrictive document](#) which accompanied the papal text that left deep traces within the traditional community.

Some of the profiles are in sync with the themes favoured by Pope Francis. For example, [the Archbishop of East Timor, do Carmo da Silva, stood out during the pandemic for his advocacy of access to vaccines for the poorest](#). Other selections make conservative Catholics cringe, such as Archbishop Steiner of Manaus, Brazil, who appears to be the successor to Archbishop Pedro Casaldàliga Pla, the prelate who spearheaded the liberation theory in vogue in the Latin American Church.

However, it would be dishonest to assume that all the new cardinals are there to reinforce a 'progressive' line. For example, one of the two African cardinals promoted, Ghanaian Bishop Baawobr of Wa, is the former superior of the White Fathers, a missionary congregation, and has repeatedly spoken out clearly and unequivocally in his country against the trivialisation of same-sex marriage, as marriage must above all remain the union of a man and a woman sacred before God.

[The most political appointment of this new consistory](#) is undoubtedly that of the only new cardinal in North America, Bishop McElroy of San Diego, California. Pope Francis preferred to honour him rather than the incumbents of the San Francisco or Los Angeles chairs, like Archbishop Gomez, president of the conference of American Bishops. Bishop McElroy acquired recent notoriety for opposing the majority of the conference, who support withholding the Eucharist from politicians who openly favor abortion. By honouring Bishop McElroy, the Pope is making it clear where his preference lies in

pastoral matters.

The in-depth renewal of the College of Cardinals is now a sure thing. At the end of the consistory on August 27th, the majority of the cardinal electors will have been created by Pope Francis: of the 131 total, 83 will have been selected by the pope, 37 by Benedict XVI, and 11 by Pope John Paul II. However, the great freedom of the cardinals, the heterogeneity of their profiles and their aspirations, means that prognostication on the next conclave will remain an extremely risky matter.