



## **Backgrounder**

Papal Transition 2013

prepared by

Office of Media Relations

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

3211 Fourth Street NE · Washington, DC 20017

202-541-3200 · 202-541-3173 fax · www.usccb.org

### ***Q&A: Legacy of Pope Benedict XVI***

#### **What were the greatest contributions of Pope Benedict XVI? What impact did he have on the world?**

Pope Benedict XVI called the Church to renew itself by rediscovering the most basic principles and central truths of the faith – love, hope, truth and the personal encounter with Jesus Christ. He brought a laser-like intellectual precision to these subjects in his books, letters and speeches. He worked tirelessly to rekindle the faith in the West and to heal divisions in the Catholic Church.

#### **How did he surprise the world?**

Many people expected Pope Benedict to be a hardliner-enforcer pope, largely because of his years of service in the Vatican's Doctrine office. But he instead proved to be a warm, loving pastor who gently and persistently called on Christians, and the whole world, to better understand the mysteries of the Christian faith and to encounter God's love and truth. And naturally, he surprised the world by becoming the first pope in modern times to resign.

#### **What did Pope Benedict do to combat clergy sexual abuse in the Church?**

During his time as Cardinal Ratzinger in the Vatican's Doctrine office, the future pope was an advocate for a more aggressive response to sex abuse. As cardinal and as pope, he was responsible for putting measures in place making it easier for bishops to quickly remove offending priests from ministry. He also had sexual abuse of a minor categorized in the Church's laws under the gravest possible crimes. Pope Benedict also reached out to survivors, meeting personally with them in the United States in 2008 and on his other foreign trips.

#### **How was Pope Benedict different from his predecessor?**

Blessed John Paul II was an actor, a poet and an athlete who commanded the world stage. Benedict XVI is a shy intellectual who gently, but persistently called people to engage the faith on a deeper level and to share it with the world. He preferred the intricacies of theology to John Paul's grand gestures, but both provided rich, compelling examples of faith lived out in the modern world.

### **What did this pope do to bring people together?**

In addition to his unprecedented outreach to Muslims, Pope Benedict did much to draw people together in the Catholic Church. This was especially evident in his outreach to traditionalist Catholics who broke away after Vatican II, as well as the unprecedented move to allow entire communities of Anglicans to come into full communion with the Catholic Church, while retaining their worship and traditions.

### **Did this pope roll back the reforms of the Second Vatican Council?**

Pope Benedict called on Catholics repeatedly to understand the Second Vatican Council as part of the continuity of the Church's 2,000-year tradition. For him, to reject or embrace the Council as a break with tradition was to misinterpret it. That, for instance, is why he allowed wider usage of the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass, to show that continuity, that richness, even diversity of Catholic tradition. He also launched the Year of Faith, which he saw as a direct continuation of the rebirth of the faith fostered by Vatican II.

### **Why didn't he give women a stronger voice in the Church?**

Pope Benedict affirmed what his predecessor said in 1994, that the Church has no authority to ordain women and that the issue is closed. However, his pontificate saw the appointment of women to leadership positions within Vatican departments, a record number of women among the theological observers at Synods of Bishops and a general trend of increasing leadership by women in the Church. In the United States in 2010, for instance, women held almost half of all administrative positions in dioceses and over a quarter of the most senior executive positions.

### **What did he do to promote the U.S. Church?**

Pope Benedict was a strong supporter of the Church in America. He named nine Americans to the College of Cardinals, more than from any other country except Italy. He also appointed Cardinal William Levada, the former archbishop of San Francisco, as head of the Vatican's Doctrine office. This was the position held by Cardinal Ratzinger before his election as pope, so it was a sign of great trust. It made Cardinal Levada the highest-ranking American in Church history.

During his April 2008 pastoral visit to the United States, Pope Benedict displayed a great affinity for the U.S. Church. He personally affirmed educators, young people, bishops and others over the course of the visit.

### **What kind of Church will his successor face?**

The next pope will certainly have to find ways to communicate the faith anew to an increasingly secular world. He will have to deal with other issues:

World peace: In the Middle East, religion must play a primary role in peace-making.

World poverty: The next pope must raise the concern for growing disparity of rich and poor. This is something Pope Benedict and Pope John Paul II both raised up.

Bioethical developments: Scientific advancements affecting the sacredness of life are critical. The Vatican has promoted adult stem cell research and must continue to do so.

Church unity: The pope's main responsibility is to be a sign and promoter of unity in the Catholic Church and a healer of divisions between people.

And of course the pope's main responsibility is to be a sign and promoter of unity in the Catholic Church.

### **When is the last time a pope resigned?**

Pope Gregory XII resigned in 1415. This was in part to help resolve a conflict of the time in more than one person claimed to be pope.

Pope Celestine V resigned after serving as pope from July-December 1294. He was a Benedictine monk who retired back to the simplicity and tranquility of monastic life. In April 2009, Pope Benedict XVI visited the tomb of Pope Celestine and left a pallium, the wool band worn on the vestments of an archbishop, at the tomb.

### **What happens when a pope resigns?**

Upon a vacancy in the papacy, the governance of the Catholic Church passes to the College of Cardinals, the bishops and Vatican officials from all over the world whose primary responsibility is to elect a new pope. Normally, they make arrangements for the funeral and burial of the deceased pope. In this case, they will have a series of meetings, called general congregations, to discuss the present needs and challenges facing the Church. They will also prepare for the upcoming papal election, called a conclave. Decisions that only the pope can make, such as appointing a bishop or convening the Synod of Bishops, must wait till after the election.

### **Who are the favorites to be the next pope?**

Papal elections are determined by current world concerns. The choice of the next pope has rested with the College of Cardinals guided by the Holy Spirit for hundreds of years. We think they both have a fine track record and wouldn't tell them how to do their job.