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"Expectations for Pope Francis' successor"

Press Conference via ZOOM
16.30 hrs Central European Time Friday 2 May 2025

IRELAND	GERMANY	INDIA	USA	SOUTH AFRICA
				
Colm Holmes WAC	Christian Weisner WAC	Virginia Saldanha CWC	Kate McElwee WOC	Nontando Hadebe CCAWT
BRAZIL	ITALY	AUSTRALIA	AUSTRIA	
				
Edson Silva WAC	Luca Badini Confalonieri WICR	Kevin Liston ACCCR	Martha Heizer WAC	

> Link to the recording of the Press Conference

Some quotes from each speaker

Colm Holmes (Ireland):
I pray that Pope Francis' successor will promote unity in diversity and not unity in uniformity!

Christian Weisner (Germany):
"We Are Church International" calls on the cardinals to take the signs of the times seriously. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we hope, the cardinals will elect a successor who will continue and intensify Pope Francis' course of reform with courage and vigour.

Virginia Saldanha (India):
Sr Simona Brambilla, was appointed Prefect of a Vatican dicastery by Pope Francis. She is said to have received an invitation to the conclave "by mistake". Why was that a mistake? As a Prefect it was her right to be at the conclave.

Kate McElwee (USA):
There is no greater example of the unfinished work of the Synod on Synodality than an all male conclave. Ordained men are getting behind closed doors to make a consequential decision about the future of the church. This is a textbook definition of the "Old Boys Club"

Nontando Hadebe (South Africa):
We would like the Synodal process to continue. That the voices of all to be intentionally heard: The youth; women; people with disabilities; LGBTI people, migrants. That it really translates into reality. They are now looking at the participation of the laity in elections of bishops which will begin to pave the way up to the conclave.

Edson Silva (Brazil):

In Brazil and in different countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Pope Francis is always very committed to the realities of the people.
Supporting social movements mainly on the themes of Land, Work and Housing.
Sensitive to people and families of sexual diversity, recognizing the importance of traditional indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.
May our base ecclesial communities be recognized as a new way of being Church.
May it recognize that unity is the expression of love in the face of diversity of ministries, charisms, genders, sexualities, and cultures.

Luca Badini Confalonieri (UK):
About 3 years ago the German Synodal Way made a number of formal recommendations, one of which has often been overlooked. Let me quote it: The discussion on a church constitution and on its norms which would be fundamental for a legal system of the entire church must be rekindled and brought to a positive conclusion. End of quote. Coincidentally, a few months earlier here at the Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research we had recently released just such a proposed constitution.

Kevin Liston (Australia):
But, there is still a lot for the next Pope to do. There is no going back. That would be walking out on the Spirit. Abhorring violent words and actions, he will be the voice of those who have no voice, and when necessary, be a disruptive voice who stubbornly insists on the way of justice, compassion and peace. This is particularly important for us in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand where the legacy of colonialism continues to cast a dark shadow. Our indigenous people are still not respected.

Martha Heizer (Austria):
I dream of a church without clericalism – Pope Farncis said. What does clericalism mean? It means that ordained men feel superior and are treated accordingly. And they have the sole say in important decisions in our church, and are not held accountable. Church leadership and ministry must not be left to ordained men alone. Governance and decision making should be separated from ordination. The church needs to be democratised with greater involvement of the people of God in all areas of church governance.

Colm Holmes (IRELAND) is the Chair of We Are Church International. He has been involved in church reform groups for over 30 years.

Christian Weisner (GERMANY) is one of the founder members of Kirchenvolksbewegung We Are Church in Germany and has for 30 years been on their Steering Committee.

> My name is Christian Weisner. I'm one of the founder members of "We Are Church" in Germany in 1995 and of "We are Church International" in Rome in 1996. Since then I've been on the Steering Committee of "We are Church in Germany" and I have covered many Synods and other events in Rome.
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> "We Are Church" was founded exactly 30 years ago in Austria in response to the abuse scandal involving the then Archbishop of Vienna (Hans Hermann Groër) and since then has been working on all continents and in international networks for a renewal of the Roman Catholic Church in line with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).
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> The five concrete demands of "We Are Church" for reform have now become a widely accepted canon of reform: shared decision making at all levels; full equality for women; no compulsory celibacy for clergy; positive sexual teaching; good news instead of threats. This applies to the Synodal Path initiated in Germany in 2019, to the World Synod convened by Pope Francis in 2020, and to other

synodal processes around the world.

In 2013 the cardinals elected Cardinal Bergoglio as a reformer after the restorative pontificates of two previous popes and at a time of the multiple crises in the RC Church: abuse scandal, financial scandal, leadership scandal, Vatileaks.

We are very thankful to Pope Francis because he has started a process of spiritual and pastoral transformation over the last 12 years. What he did was absolutely necessary to start restoring the credibility of the Church. Members of the Catholic Church not only in Germany but in the whole world now rightly expect that this transformation process will be continued and secured in canon law.

The rediscovery of synodality and subsidiarity by Pope Francis are strong prophetic signs and courses of action in view of the dangerous growth of autocratic power systems in the political world. Christian faith has to be proclaimed and practised in a credible and contemporary manner. Only in this way it will be possible to truly overcome the internal and external crises of credibility in the Roman Catholic Church

Today, five days before the conclave, which will begin on May 7, “We Are Church International” calls on the cardinals, to take the signs of the times seriously. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we hope, the cardinals will elect a successor who will continue and intensify Pope Francis' course of reform with courage and vigour. And then it will be up to all of us, with the new pope, with every cardinal and every bishop, to ensure that our Church regains its credibility and becomes a home for all.

Virginia Saldanha (INDIA) is a theologian and journalist based in Mumbai/India. She is the former Executive Secretary of the Office of Laity & Family of the Asian Catholic Bishops' Forum knowns as FABC., and she also headed the Indian bishops' Commission for Women. She is the founder member and secretary of the Indian Women's Theologians Forum and she is the Chairperson of the Catholic Women’s Council.

Kate McElwee (USA/ITALY) is the executive director of the Women's Ordination Conference, founded in 1975, which is the oldest and largest organisation working to ordain women as deacons, priests and bishops into an inclusive and accountable Roman Catholic Church. She also serves on the Leadership Circle of Women's Ordination Worldwide and is based in Rome.

Nontando Hadebe (SOUTH AFRICA) is a theologian working in South Africa. She is a member in several women-led organizations (including the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians)advocating for inclusive gender justice for all leaving no one behind.

Edson Silva (BRAZIL) has been involved with We Are Church São Paulo for many years working for church reforms and social justice.

"Expectations for Pope Francis' successor”
Good afternoon! I would like to thank the International Movement We Are the Church for participating in this press conference and discussing expectations for Pope Francis’ successor.

My name is Edson Silva, a lay Christian who works in the city of São Paulo in ecclesiastical and political organizations. I am a sociologist and have a master's degree in Social Work. I am married to Rosi and father of Sophia, who is 12 years old.

My ecclesiastical work is in We Are Church in São Paulo, in the Lay Council of the Archdiocese of São Paulo and in the Latin American Lay Network. Spaces where we experience and promote the Christian experience committed to those preferred by God.

We thank Pope Francis for giving us the experience of a Church that is the People of God.

At the last conclave we were all waiting for a new time, a spring in the life of the Church. And Pope Francis made this new path possible with the participation of different actors. He invited us to experience the inclusive and merciful method.

The first communities and the experience with the risen Christ returned to the center of ecclesial life. Pope Francis offered love, welcome and social justice as bridges of dialogue with the Church and the world.

In Brazil and in different countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Pope Francis is always very committed to the realities of the people. Supporting social movements mainly on the themes of Land, Work and Housing.
Sensitive to people and families of sexual diversity, recognizing the importance of traditional indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.

Close to marginalized groups such as the homeless population, victims of climate emergencies, people and families who migrate for better living conditions, families and victims of sexual abuse, women who fight for their effective role in the Church and in Society.
We hope that the next pope will be a man of prayer, of closeness, capable of listening, who will engage in dialogue with those who are different and diverse.

May it follow the path of Francis, implementing the proposals of the Synod of Synodality, evangelize the structures of the Roman Curia, strengthen the continental and local Churches, review and expand the priestly ministry to all baptized people, with celibacy being an optional condition, welcome our brothers and sisters, sons and daughters who are homosexual as part of this Church, empower women in decision-making spaces, value lay Christians as protagonists in Evangelization and also in ecclesiastical administration.

May our base ecclesial communities be recognized as a new way of being Church. May the next Pope present to the world and the Church the cultural and pastoral riches of his people, their experiences of faith and social commitment. May it recognize that unity is the expression of love in the face of diversity of ministries, charisms, genders, sexualities, and cultures.

We don't want him to be a distant authority, a prince, we want him to be a shepherd like Jesus Christ and to be close to God's people on the way. Before I finish, I would also like to share in the chat a document written by the Latin American Lay Network that is addressed to the Cardinals who are in Rome for the Conclave.
edsongposilva@gmail.com

Luca Badini Confalonieri (UK) is a theologian and is the Director of the Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research in London.

Kevin Liston (AUSTRALIA) After a career working with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants while contributing to development of policy and programs in South Australia, nationally and internationally, Kevin completed degrees in theology and psychology. He is committed to encouraging spiritual renewal and church reform at parish, diocesan and national levels.

Martha Heizer (AUSTRIA) is an Educationalist, Psychologist and one of the co-founders of We Are Church in Austria 30 years ago.

Media Contact

Colm Holmes, Chair *We are Church International*
Email: colmholmes2020@gmail.com Phone: +353 86606 3636

Dr Martha Heizer, Vice-Chair *We are Church International*
Email: martha@heizer.at Phone: +43 650 4168500

Christian Weisner, *Wir sind Kirche Deutschland*
Email: presse@wir-sind-kirche.de Phone: +49 172-51 84 082

We Are Church International
Website: https://www.we-are-church.org
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/wacintl/

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