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Vatican Prepares for Papal Succession amid Ideological Divide



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Rome, April 23, 2025 With Pope Francis' passing, the Catholic Church stands at a historic crossroads, as cardinals prepare for a conclave that could shape its direction for decades. The upcoming vote is widely seen as a contest between those aligned with Francis' progressive vision and a minority seeking a return to traditionalism.

Francis, the first pope from the Global South, reshaped the College of Cardinals by breaking with the custom of favoring prelates from Europe and North America. Instead, he appointed cardinals from underrepresented regions including Tonga, Myanmar, and Haiti, making the voting body more reflective of the global Church.

Of the 252 cardinals, 135 are under 80 and thus eligible to vote. Most were appointed by Francis and largely support his agenda. However, a vocal and well-funded conservative bloc remains.

Critics opposed his openness to LGBTQ+ Catholics, communion for remarried divorcees, and his push for environmental and migrant advocacy. His views often clashed with more doctrinaire members of the Church.

Before his death, Francis endorsed a three-year reform initiative focusing on greater roles for women, the laity, and decentralized decision-making through the Synod of Bishops. The process is set to continue until 2028.

Though the next pope is expected to reflect Francis' reforms, the conclave could still bring surprises. As cardinals gather beneath Michelangelo's Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel, the Church awaits a pivotal decision: to continue forward or pivot back.