

# Pope says two-thirds majority always needed to elect pope

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI has stipulated that a two-thirds majority always is required to elect a new pope, undoing a more flexible procedure introduced by Pope John Paul II.

In a one-page document released June 26, the pope said the two-thirds-majority rule cannot be set aside even when cardinal-electors are at an impasse.

Instead, the pope instructed that if the cardinals are deadlocked after 13 days, runoff ballots between the two leading candidates will be held. A papal election will continue to require a majority of two-thirds of the cardinals present.

In 1996, Pope John Paul introduced a change in the conclave procedure that allowed cardinal-electors to move to a simple majority after 13 days, when 33 or 34 ballots had been held.

Pope Benedict said there had been significant requests for a return to the old rules, under which a two-thirds majority was always required.

The pope effected the change by replacing two paragraphs of his predecessor's apostolic constitution, "Universi Dominici Gregis" ("The Lord's Whole Flock"), a document that defined conclave procedures.

Under Pope Benedict's new rule, if a conclave has not elected a pope after 13 days, the cardinals will pause for a day of prayer, reflection and dialogue, then move to a runoff election between the two cardinals who had obtained the most votes on the previous ballot.

The two leading cardinals would not vote in the runoff ballots, though they would remain in the Sistine Chapel, where conclaves are held.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman, said the pope's modification "removes the option of moving to a simple majority, 50 percent plus

one.” It also removes the option of continuing to seek a two-thirds majority on an open ballot, he said.

“This is a response to requests that the one elected always be elected with an ample consensus,” Father Lombardi said.

The pope’s action also eliminates the possibility that a conclave stalemated between two strong candidates could turn to a compromise choice after the 13th day.

Most experts believe the chance of a conclave lasting that long in modern times is very small. Over the last century, no conclave has lasted more than five days.

Pope Benedict was elected in 2005 on the second day of the conclave, after only three ballots.

Pope Benedict’s document, an apostolic letter issued only in Latin, was signed June 11.