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By Agostino Bono

Vatican City (NC) — Among the closely guarded secrets at the Vatican is when the pope will name new cardinals.

Experienced Vatican watchers often find their guestimates off by months and sometimes by as much as a year.

Even more strongly guarded is the list of people the pope will appoint as princes of the Church.

The guessing usually starts when there is a large number of vacancies in the College of Cardinals. Under Church rules, there can be no more than 120 cardinals under the age of 80 and thus eligible to elect a pope.

When Cardinal James Darcy Freeman, retired archbishop of Sydney, Australia, turns 80 November 19, there will be 22 openings for voting-eligible cardinals, giving Pope John Paul II the chance to significantly restructure the geography and ideology of the college if he wishes.

This is important because under the current pope, the college has grown in influence. Every three years he has convoked special meetings of the college to advise him on pressing Church matters, such as Vatican finances and reform of the Curia, the Church's central administrative offices.

When Pope John Paul first started the practice in 1979 he called it "an important step on the path of collegiality."

In 1985, he also raised the college to its highest number, 152 — including those over the voting age.

Historically, cardinals have been principal advisers to popes. Today many individual cardinals still are key papal counselors — especially those who head curial agencies and the heads of major Sees who can afford to periodically travel to the Vatican to gain the pope's ear.

In previous years, the College of Cardinals had been declining in influence with the exception of their role in electing a new pope.

Much of the decline was due to the internationalization of the college begun by Pope Paul VI and continued by the present pope. This has made frequent meetings of the college impractical and costly, especially for heads of poor Third-World Sees.

Currently, there is a regional imbalance in the college in relation to the global Catholic population.

Most of the cardinals eligible to elect a pope are European. They number 48 — not far from half the electors — although the continent has slightly less than one-third of the world's Catholic population.

Latin America, with 42 percent of the Catholic population, has only 16 electors. Africa, with less than 10 percent of the world's Catholics has 13.

By adding 22 new members, the pope could readjust the imbalance or increase it. He may also make the college more ideologically compatible with his own views

or he can keep it diverse and pluralistic so that no one view dominates and all views are challenged.

For those who want to make their own guestimates about the future composition of the college, here are two guidelines:

● The pope chooses archbishops who are in charge of Vatican agencies normally headed by cardinals.

● He also chooses churchmen who head archdioceses normally ruled by cardinals.

Under these criteria, some likely candidates are Archbishops James Hickey of Washington; Roger Mahony of Los Angeles; Kevin McNamara of Dublin, Ireland; Prospero Penados del Barrio of Guatemala City; Rene Fernandez Apaza of Sucre, Bolivia; and Edward Bede Clancy of Sydney, Australia.

The rules, however, are not hard and fast.

Pope John Paul has included several surprises among the 60 cardinals he has already named since taking office.

In 1983, he named Bishop Julijans Vaivods, apostolic administrator of Riga, Latvia, as the first cardinal living in the

Soviet Union. That move was interpreted as a sign of Vatican desire to keep religion alive in the communist-ruled zone. In 1985 he made Archbishop Miguel Obando Bravo of Managua the first Nicaraguan cardinal, giving the critic of the Marxist-influenced Sandinista government greater prestige.

Little inside information is available on when the pope will name new cardinals, but some sources expect him to act after he announces a curial reform plan based on the recommendations of the College of Cardinals.

The pope would have the opportunity to extensively restructure the Curia by replacing several officials who are over the retirement age of 75. These include Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, president of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, and Cardinal Paul Augustin Mayer, head of the Vatican Congregations for Sacraments and Divine Worship.

When will the pope announce curial reforms?

That is another closely guarded Vatican secret.

**Lefebvre society superior general  
refuses to compromise on doctrine**

By John Thavis

Rome (NC) — The superior general of suspended Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre's society of priests said his group would not give up its basic doctrinal positions in an eventual reconciliation with the Vatican.

In a letter to members of the Priestly Society of St. Pius X, Father Franz Schmidberger also stated that if current attempts to mediate such a reconciliation failed, Archbishop Lefebvre would ordain three or four bishops "without hesitation." Ordination of bishops by Archbishop Lefebvre would formalize a schism.

A papally appointed visitor arrived November 11 at the society's headquarters in Ecône, Switzerland, to study a solution to the longstanding conflict.

Excerpts from Father Schmidberger's letter, sent in mid-October, were published by the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera November 18.

"The only right we are demanding is that of continuing the 2,000-year-old tradition of the Church against the ideologies of a wicked religious liberty, a ruinous ecumenism and a liturgy that is no longer Catholic," Father Schmidberger wrote in his letter.

He confirmed the quotations in a telephone interview with National Catholic News Service the same day. "The fraternity has always defended these points. It would be very difficult to make a compromise on the dogmatic contents," he said in the telephone interview.

Archbishop Lefebvre's society has rejected the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, particularly in the three areas cited by Father Schmidberger: liturgy, ecumenism and religious liberty. The archbishop has also sharply criticized Pope John Paul II and Vatican offices for implementing the council's teachings.

Father Schmidberger's letter said any reconciliation should provide sufficient autonomy for the society, "including the freedom to combat contemporary errors inside the Church." He also suggested that the society be given its own rite in recognition of its own liturgical tradition. The group rejects the current Mass rite in favor of the pre-conciliar Tridentine rite.

Pope Paul VI, who suspended Archbishop Lefebvre from his ministry as a priest and bishop in 1976, made acceptance of the new Mass rite a basic condition for reconciliation.

According to Father Schmidberger, that condition no longer applies. He said Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, assured Archbishop Lefebvre that the society would not be asked to accept in writing the council's liturgical changes.

He also said Cardinal Ratzinger has given assurances that the society will be allowed to continue the formation of priests according to "its own charism."

Cardinal Ratzinger has met twice with Archbishop Lefebvre at the Vatican in recent months.

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