

First American pope ever is elected

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"Viva il Papa": Born Robert Prevost in Chicago in 1955, Leo XIV spent 10 years as a pastor in Peru and is both a Peruvian and an American citizen.

Does the film *Conclave* help explain how he won? The cardinals were locked in the Sistine Chapel for just over 24 hours before electing the new pope yesterday. Some think the hit film told us what to expect.

What's happening?

Just hours after being elected, Pope Leo XIV faced a social media storm. Old posts on X resurfaced, including one that seemed to criticise Donald Trump. As the first North American **pope**, he likely expected this attention. His quick election is still surrounded by secrecy and political debate.

The process of electing a new pope is known as a papal conclave.

Conclaves are shrouded in secrecy. The **cardinals** gather daily in the chapel to discuss and vote, and the votes are burnt after each ballot.

Find out more

The public were recently given a taste of this intrigue by the award-winning film *Conclave*, which tells a dramatic tale of cunning plots and shocking twists.

Many have pointed out the film's accurate details. Some cardinals allegedly watched the film before setting off for the real life conclave.

The film shows a power struggle between moderate, **conservative** and **liberal** branches of the church, which mirrors the real life frontrunners, which include the "steady hand" candidate Pietro Parolin, the right-wing Peter Erdo and the left-leaning Luis Antonio Tagle.

But some think the film gets the character of the **College of Cardinals** wrong. As Cardinal Philippe Barbarin said: "No one can tell you who to vote for." The scheming priests in the film do little else.

Does the film *Conclave* help explain how he won?

Some say

Yes! It may have crazy twists and simple factions, but *Conclave* is a well-researched film that places us in the atmosphere of a papal election.

Others think

No! The film downplays the role of faith in a church based on it. But watching *Conclave* you might think cardinals are exactly like politicians.

Some people say

“Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn’t.”

Mark Twain (1835 – 1910), American novelist and wit

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What do you think?

Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - Do you care who sits on the Papal throne? What impact does the pope have on your life?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: What is the origin of the word “conclave”? Why is the Vatican City the centre of the Catholic Church?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain about this story and one thing we cannot say for sure.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - You are elected pope. Would you accept the role?

5. Express

What do others believe? - In pairs, discuss the sort of traits a religious leader should display.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - The pope has been chosen. Research the new Pope and explain whether or not you think the cardinals made a good choice.

Glossary

Pope - The bishop of Rome and the head of the worldwide Catholic Church.

Cardinals - Leading officials in the Roman Catholic Church. They are nominated by the Pope, and choose the next Pope together.

Conservative - Holding traditional values, and in a political context, favouring policies such as private ownership.

Liberal - Liberalism is a school of political thought that stresses individual liberty. Liberals believe that society should not try to impose values or behaviours on individuals but should be tolerant of different lifestyles. A leading exponent of liberal thought was the 19th-century English philosopher John Stuart Mill, the author of the classic work *On Liberty*.

College of Cardinals - The chief ecclesiastical body of the Roman Catholic Church, electing and advising the pope and comprising all of the cardinals of the church.