

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement by Seattle Archbishop J. Peter Sartain On the election of Pope Francis

At 11:07 a.m. Seattle time, I witnessed on television with the rest of the world the dramatic sight of white smoke billowing from the flue atop the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican announcing that the cardinals had elected a new Bishop of Rome, the pope. As is now well known, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, S.J., Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, has chosen the name Francis. The election of a new pope is a time of joy and excitement for the whole world, the universal church, and individual Catholics — including bishops like me in the Pacific Northwest. Since Pope Francis is a member of the Society of Jesus, his election holds particular excitement for the many Jesuits who serve in the Archdiocese of Seattle, and I congratulate them as well. I have no doubt that Franciscans around the world also rejoice that he has taken the name of their founder, Francis of Assisi, a man called by God in the early 13th century to live the gospel wholeheartedly, clearly and simply.

Almost 35 years ago, October 16, 1978, I had the privilege of being in St. Peter's Square when the same scene unfolded at the election of Pope John Paul II. Great excitement surrounded me that night, and as the pontificate of now Blessed John Paul II unfolded, we learned why such enthusiasm was warranted. Though traveling in Tennessee the day Pope Benedict XVI was elected, I nonetheless felt the same enthusiasm as reports streamed across the television. Watching the announcement unfold this morning, I was again filled with excitement, awe and hope in God. We in the United States may not yet know much about Pope Francis, but as with our previous popes the coming years will reveal the gift God has given us.

The election of a new pope is an act of faith on the part of the cardinals, because they have placed their hope in God to guide them. For me as an archbishop and for Catholics everywhere, receiving a new pope means that God has been once again faithful to his promise that he would always provide a shepherd for the church, a successor to St. Peter, a bishop of Rome, the first pastor of the universal church. His choice of the name Francis signals that he strives to be a man of humility and love for the poor, and the fact that he asked the hundreds of thousand standing before him to pray for him further underscores his humility. He told those gathered that he is there to evangelize the City of Rome; that is the prime role of every bishop — to proclaim the good news of Christ.

It is natural that we will all want to know more about our new pope, his personality, his experience, and his family. Our previous popes have brought with them a wealth of background that made them who they were. But more than all of that, it is important that Catholics understand the election of a new pope as a spiritual event that is filled with joy and hope. Not even knowing who he would be, I began praying for him weeks ago.

I congratulate His Holiness, Pope Francis, on his election to the See of Peter. I promise my obedience and my prayers. As was announced at the Vatican just a few hours ago, we have indeed received news of great joy in the election of Pope Francis.

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