

Your Shortcut to... The Making of a Pope

It started roughly 2,000 years ago with a fisherman named Peter...More than 260 men have worn the Papal robes since then...And now, the world is waiting for a brand-new Pope to be chosen. This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to The Making of a Pope — the podcast where we dive into the who, what, where, when, why and how of the big news stories. I'm Christie Kijurina.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

Hey Bryce, if you suddenly found yourself in charge of a country, a church, and more than a billion of people around the world, what would be the first thing you did?

Mandatory gelato every Friday. Obviously. But seriously, I'd probably call for world peace... and then replace the Popemobile for a Popescooter. Much zippier.

I can see it now! Pope Bryce the First, zooming through Vatican City.

Only in my dreams. Today, we're investigating WHAT the Papacy actually is, WHERE the Pope lives and works, and HOW a new Pope is chosen. So grab your Popemobile keys and your feathered Swiss Guard helmet and let's roll!

Listen carefully. There's a S'Quiz at the end.

WHAT

Bryce, you probably know the Pope is the leader of the Catholic Church — the biggest Christian group on the planet, and the second-biggest religion overall after Sunni Islam. As head of the Church, the Pope is the spiritual leader for around 1.3 billion people worldwide.

Woah — that's one massive Sunday service! But how did this enormous job even begin?

It all started with Saint Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends. After Jesus died, Peter stepped up as the leader of the early Christians — and is often called the very first Pope. In the Bible, Jesus called Peter his “rock” — the strong foundation on which the Church would be built.

So the Papacy — that's the official word for the Pope's role — has been going strong for around 2,000 years?

Yep! It's one of the oldest institutions still running today. Of course, it hasn't always been smooth sailing. In the Middle Ages, there were times when two or even three Popes were fighting over the top job!

Talk about office politics! And I know the Pope is always a man, but isn't there a crazy story about a woman sneaking into the role?

Ah, the legend of Pope Joan! A woman who supposedly disguised herself as a man and became Pope. Most historians think it's just a myth... but it's been told and retold for hundreds of years.

These days, Popes don't control armies and kingdoms. Instead, they focus on issues like fighting poverty, caring for refugees, protecting the planet... Pretty important stuff. But, Christie, where does all this important work actually happen?

WHERE

Bryce, home sweet home for the Pope is Vatican City — a tiny country inside the city of Rome, Italy. It's only about half a square kilometre big — that's smaller than some shopping centres!

That's right, Christie. The Pope lives right next to St Peter's Basilica — that giant, awe-inspiring church you see in photos. It's built on the very spot where Saint Peter is believed to be buried.

Wow! And tucked inside Vatican City is the Sistine Chapel — you know, the one with Michelangelo's jaw-dropping ceiling painting? That's where the big, secret meeting happens to choose the next Pope.

The whole place has lots of security. Protecting the Pope is a very fancy bunch of bodyguards called the Swiss Guard. To join, you've got to be Swiss, Catholic, trained like a top soldier... and be willing to rock a stripy uniform with a feathered helmet. It's serious work — even if the outfit looks ready for a costume party!

And, did you know, that hidden behind the Vatican walls, there's a secret archive, like an exclusive library, stuffed with ancient scrolls, letters, and treasures — like a real-life Da Vinci Code.

Very cool! But Christie, what does the Pope actually do all day?

Well, every day's a big one. The Pope leads Mass — a kind of Church service — meets with world leaders, writes important letters to guide Catholics around the world, and greets visitors. And when he travels around Vatican City, it's not in a limo — it's in the Popemobile! It looks like a super-souped-up golf cart

Cool! And on big occasions like Easter and Christmas, millions of people — Catholic or not — tune in to hear him speak. But lately I've been wondering when a Pope dies or steps down... what happens next?

HOW

So Bryce, when a Pope dies or resigns, it's time for a Conclave! Lots of the Cardinals — they're senior church leaders aged under 80 — gather in the famous Sistine Chapel. This time there'll be 135 of them.

And they're locked in — literally! They can't leave until they pick a new Pope. (Conclave actually means 'locked room' in Latin.) No pressure, right?

"Not a big deal at all.. Not. They vote by secret ballot. If they can't agree? They vote again. And again. If they haven't managed to agree, the votes are burned and black smoke rises from the Sistine Chapel chimney. Then finally, when someone gets two-thirds plus one of the votes, white smoke rises from the Sistine Chapel chimney and the world knows: Habemus Papam! (We have a Pope!)

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The 267th Pope. So, Christie, could my dream of becoming Pope ever actually come true?

Well, Bryce, technically, the Cardinals could elect any Catholic man as Pope, but in reality, it's always been a Cardinal since 1379.

Once they're picked, the new Pope accepts the job and chooses a new name. Pope Francis chose his name to honour Saint Francis of Assisi, who was known for helping the poor, nature and animals.

Ahh - nice! And as for names — John's been the most popular with 23 Pope Johns! But there've been some quirkier ones too... Pope Simplicius, Pope Zosimus... and yes, even Pope Hilarius.

And, he'll get kitted out in some pretty amazing gear too. There's the Papal mitre — that tall, pointy hat — and the Fisherman's Ring, which gets smashed when the Pope dies to symbolise the end of his reign. The traditions, the history, the drama — it's no wonder the whole world will be watching when the white smoke finally rises.

THE S'QUIZ

"This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening...

1. What is the tiny country inside Rome where the Pope lives called? (Vatican City)"

2 What's the name of the ceremony where Cardinals pick a new Pope? (A Conclave)

3 What colour smoke tells the world that a new Pope has been chosen? (White smoke)

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for joining us as we explored the who, what, how, where, when, and why of The Making of a Pope.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day!

Over and out.