

Diary from Rome

During the Conclave 2013, March 4-14

by Christian Weisner, *International Movement We are Church*, media contact

Monday, 4 March 2013

Christian Weisner reports:

Martha Heizer and I arrived safely on Monday morning from the night train to Rome. Basilio Buffoni arrived around the same time from Milan and all three of us proceeded to a meeting

We are now waiting to welcome Anthony Padovano from the USA, Michael Walsh from England and Vittorio Bellavite from Milan. Our next meeting will be this evening and will include discussion about the content and presentation of our pre-Conclave press conference.

Vittorio has already been busy preparing our way in Rome so that we will be able to keep the media fully informed about current concerns and needs in the Church including our perception of the right person for the role of Bishop of Rome. We are hoping that the Cardinals will announce the beginning of the Conclave very soon.

The six of us are very grateful to Valerie, Pedro and Christian for re-launching the website and installing Twitter. We will be using this page to let you know about our work and adventures in the Eternal City.

Tuesday, 5 March 2013

Last evening we hurried to a beautiful church on the Isola Tibertina run by the Community of San'Egidio where Cardinal Schoenborn from Vienna/Austria was holding a service to commemorate a 20th century martyr. Many media people were present because Schoenborn is one of the "Papabile" and we talked to journalist from Italy, Austria, The Tablet and NCR whom we know from earlier events in Rome. All the journalists are only talking about the candidates. We put much more emphasis on the question how the hierarchical system has to be changed - because currently it is totally dysfunctional.

In the evening it became known that the Cardinals might decide about the beginning of the Conclave on Wednesday. Three German Cardinals (Meisner, Lehmann, Woelki) haven't arrived in Rome yet I read in the newspaper, but we do not know why.

Tuesday, March 5, 23:30

Christian Weisner's letter from Rome

This morning we welcomed Prof. Michael Walsh from UK and Paul Collins and Marylin Hatton from Australia. Now we are only waiting for Vittorio Bellavite to arrive from Milan.

In the newspaper I read that 107 of the 115 cardinals who are allowed to vote have now arrived in Rome. I also read that Card. Schoenborn (who is allowed to vote) and Card. Vlk (who is too old to vote) are hoping for a Pope who is open to the world like John Paul II. There are other Cardinals who ask for more information about Vatileaks, who want to continue to clear up the sexual abuse cases within the church and who are asking for reform of the leadership of the Church.

The last issue was the one we also were working on today. We discussed in detail the content of our presentation on Thursday and our written document. We please to confirm that the background talk will take place on Thursday evening at 17:30 p.m at the Monastero delle Suore camaldolesi all'Aventino.

Just by chance I found an international / multilingual website www.voteforpope.net of the University of Montreal and other organisation where you can elect "your" candidate.

However we don't want to give our opinion about different candidates.

We find it much more important to express our expectations for the next Pontificat and to spread information about the different groups of cardinals. About 40 Cardinals are in close contact with "Opus Dei" and about 20 cardinals are in close contact with "Movimento di Comunione e Liberazione". But even as a coalition they won't be strong enough to form a 2/3 majority. So there will be longer negotiations before and during the Conclave I guess.

Keep your fingers crossed that the Cardinals will come to a decision about the beginning of the Conclave soon.

Wednesday, 6 March - 20:44

This morning our team had a short briefing again. Our "document" seems to find very positive response from IMWAC member groups. Now the translations will be done by our voluntary translators. Valerie is working on the website. The speakers, Basilio and his team are preparing the presentation that we'll have Thursday evening at the Monastery. Thank you all very much!

Martha found out that this afternoon the Cardinals had a prayer in St. Peter's Basilica at 5 p.m. Surely, we wanted to take part and passed the control at the entrance of St. Peter. But only nuns and priest and those lay men and women who went to confession were allowed to go to the Rosary of the Cardinals. "The church" didn't want us to help with prayers for the next pope. So we decided to go back to the hotel and to solve the technical problems of internet and so on...

We don't know the date of the beginning of the Conclave yet. It might start even later than March 10 or 11. The Cardinals are still discussing the general cause of the church. The Cardinals from the US don't want to go into the Conclave I read somewhere. German Cardinal Kasper, former Prefect of Ecomenism, wants to have much more transparency inside the Roman Curia, "Centre" should not automatically mean "Centralism". So we will have to wait and wait and wait - together with 5000 media workers in a rainy and a little bit depressing Rome.

Thursday, 7 March 2013 - 23:30

Yesterday SNAP (Survivors Network Abused by Priest) published a blacklist of 12 Cardinals. This is different to our purpose which is to bring positive suggestions from the People of God to Rome: a way of bringing about a new system of decisionmaking which is badly needed in our church.

Today was THE day that we had our first presentation about the history and the future of the future of the papacy with five perfect speakers: Martha Heizer(AT), Michael Walsh (UK), Paul Collins (AU), Anthony Padovano (US) and Marilyn Hatton (AU). Basilio Buffoni and Vittorio Bellavite, together with some very good helping hands, had organised everything very well. You will find the statement in various languages below on this website.

What I said yesterday still holds true. We don't know the date of the beginning of the Conclave yet. It might start even later than March 10 or 11. The Cardinals are still discussing the general situation in the church.

Anthony Padovano and Michael Walsh are leaving tomorrow. Martha Heizer is going home but will come back for our next press conference that hopefully will take place shortly before the beginning of the Conclave. I will stay Rome and will wait.

Friday, 8 March 2013

Today is the International Women's Day. In the morning Martha and I had the last briefing together. Change.org might start an international campaign with us about the main tasks of the next pope. Then Martha left for her home in Austria. At the moment I'm the last of IMWAC's team in Rome. I read in the news what the journalists wrote about our event yesterday evening and answered requests from other journalist who will come to Rome in the next few days.

It is still raining in Rome. At St. Peters Basilica a discovered that the pilgrims and tourists walk over the plaque which commemorates Pope John XXIII and the date of the opening of the Second Vatican Council.



At noon I went to the Vatican's press office Sala Stampa. I'm not an accredited journalist but I wanted to meet there some friendly journalists who I know. Just by chance the German

television recognised me and asked me what we, the People of God, would want the next Pope to do first. I said the usual arguments. In the afternoon I just dropped in into an Orthodox liturgy - and enjoyed the richness of Christian liturgies with a nice Choir, candles, and incense.

Tonight the Vatican announced that the Cardinals will start the Conclave on Tuesday. Now the date is fixed we have to plan for our second presentation which unfortunately will be without Anthony Padovano and Michael Walsh who already had to leave for home, but Martha will come back. Could it be seen as a slight sign of change that the Cardinals announced the date for the Conclave on the International Women's Day???

Elfriede Harth comments:

"It is indeed an additional good omen to announce the opening of the Conclave on International Women's Day. I am sure that things will continue changing. If you look back you will realize how many things have changed! We are at a cross roads and the current crisis bears lots of chances. So our presence (visibility) in Rome and elsewhere and our voices now are particularly important. I am further convinced that many diverging voices are better than one single strong voice. The Catholic faith community is like an orchestra that has largely learned to play on their own interpreting the symphony of the Good News. A large variety of instruments play different roles in that symphony. We are expecting a new director for this orchestra to be appointed soon - and hopefully he (no she possible for the moment! - unless..... a miracle would happen! -) he will be able to play this marvellous instrument that an Orchestra constitutes.... But a director without the orchestra.... is nobody!"

Weekend, 9 and 10 March 2013

Yesterday I walked through sunny Rome and visited Santa Sabina all'Aventino (one of the oldest and probably the most beautiful church in Rome), San Alessio and Sant'Anselmo (Benedictine University and College in Rome). But this was the only free time I had here in Rome since I came here on Monday. Even at the churches I got phone calls and met a journalist I know from Germany. More and more journalists are now coming to Rome and want to talk to someone from We are Church. At today's breakfast I met three of them in the hotel where I am staying.

With the beginning of the Conclave fixed by the Cardinals for Tuesday afternoon time is too short for Stampa Estera to invite us for a press conference and too short to organise a press conference of our own. So we will send out a press release on Monday morning telling the Cardinals how they should vote. I am joking, of course! I'm sure some of them are in favour of some reforms. But are they strong enough to find a common candidate? And are they strong enough to stop the group connected to "Opus Dei" and "Movimento di Comunione e Liberazione"?

Monday, March 11, 22:00

Today we got confirmation from Stampa Estera, the Foreign Press Association here in Rome, that we are invited to give a press conference in their office. This is a unique chance for us to get close contact to the international journalist in Rome. The press conference was planned for 11 a.m. but was postponed to the afternoon 14:30 p.m. because of two reasons: The Cardinals

will have a prayer in San Pietro basilica at 10 a.m. and a "pink smoke" activity of women fighting for women's ordination will take place at 11 a.m. at Piazza Garibaldi. Vittorio has written a new draft for a press release and I work all day with sending and receiving emails, trying to coordinate the next days of the Conclave.

When I gave a short interview this morning to the Spanish TV-channel La Sexta near San Pietro I met just by chance an Auxiliary Bishop from Germany who was also in Rome for an interview. He is one of the open minded Bishops in Germany you can see quite often in the media. He told me: Now it's time for a new start, a break-up in church. I hope the Cardinals would listen to him if they don't listen to us. Reform certainly is needed in the centre of the church, in the Roman Curia. But will it be only a little bit of reform to keep the present system alive ? Or will we see substantial reforms as we and so many are asking for? I'm thinking of Hans Kueng (who will celebrate his 85th birthday on March 19) and of so many other theologians all over the world.

While I'm writing this diary Martha Heizer, IMWAC's chair, is on the night train from Austria to Rome to join our team again. Good night, Martha! Good night to all of you.

Tuesday, 12 March 2013

This morning the Cardinals prayed in St. Peter's basilica for a good election of the next pope while the women had their "pink smoke" activity nearby. I couldn't go to both events because I had to send out a press release for Hans Kueng's 85th birthday next week, to prepare our press conference and to answer all media requests. But Martha (who is back from her home in Innsbruck/Austria) and Marilyn and many others went there. [You can see a report on the Internet](#) . It was the top news at yahoo.it.

In the afternoon we had the IMWAC press conference at Stampa Estera, the Foreign Press Association, where almost 20 journalists from international media were present. Vittorio (who came from his hometown Milano for today), Martha, Marilyn and I had many one to one interviews afterwards. I would like to say many thanks to Stampa Estera! From there I rushed off to a live interview with France24, later this evening I had two radio interviews with BBC at St. Peter's square. In fact I was interviewed together with an American professor at the Opus Dei university in Rome. The funny thing: We had very similar ideas what needed to be changed in the church - at least more collegiality and a better esteem of the laity. From there we could see the smoke of the first ballot - it was black.

The hotel where we stay until now is very nice but much too far away from the Vatican. With the help from my wife and her best friend in Germany I found a hotel very close to the Vatican where we will move to tomorrow morning. We have to be at hand to the journalists when the white smoke will come from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel.

Wednesday & Thursday, March 13 & 14, 23:30

Today is the second day of the Conclave. I tried to prepare everything for THE moment e.g. inform the journalists how they could reach us for interviews, send lists of email addresses to Laura so that she could send out our press release directly after the announcement of the new Pope. At midday Martha and I moved to the hotel near St. Peter. Then Martha went to a liturgy by Janice from Women's Ordination Worldwide. In the afternoon I wrote a draft for our press release which didn't comment on the new Pope (who we still don't know) but on the

agenda he has to work on. Valerie and Brendan, our native English speakers, polished up my draft. Now all documents are posted on the website www.we.are.church.org which was fixed and updated by Valerie just in time. While I started to work on the translation into German I suddenly heard the word "bianco" from the TV, it was 19:06. Shocked that THE moment came so early I phoned Martha and just said to her "white smoke". Then Martha, Marilyn and I together with many thousands of Romans rushed to St. Peter's Square.

We waited in the rain until Cardinal Tauran said the words "Habemus Papam" (applause) and "Cardinal Bergoglio" (silence) - because nobody knew him and he was not on the list of the journalists. His name Francesco (from Assisi), never been used by another Pope before, hopefully is also a programme and a promise that he wants the Church to work for and with the poor. It was Francesco who wanted to rebuild and renew the Church. What a huge task! His first welcome was moving. He asked us to pray for him, only then he blessed us. That was a form of acceptance of the bishop by the People of God that was done in the first centuries.

This was the moment I expected to receive many phone calls from journalists but no phone call reached me - the mobile networks just broke down because so many wanted to make phone calls from here. So I had to give many interviews later on until midnight from the hotel. After midnight I sent emails to our Argentinian group Helder Camara and to some Jesuits I knew. I congratulated them on the new Pope and asked for further information about Jorge Mario Bergoglio. In principle they said: Give him a chance for the future.

On Thursday I had the first interview at 6:30 on an empty and sunny St. Peter's Square, and from then onwards almost every 15 minutes. I didn't count them and I didn't count the taxi rides I had between TV interviews at St. Peter's Square or on roofs around St. Peter and telephone interviews in our hotel. Martha was getting a bad cold because of the rain yesterday. So I had to do most of them but I was in close contact with Martha, our chair, about what to say. Martha's train left Rome at 16:15 but she got stuck in Verona. So her husband will have to fetch her at the border to Austria. I'm now on the nighttrain to Munich where I will give another radio interview immediately after my arrival and will report to our Bundesversammlung this weekend in Bamberg.

After 11 stressful and hectic but also thrilling and very interesting days in a rainy and sunny city of Rome I want to thank everybody for her and his contribution in this enormous teamwork. Not everybody worked in Rome but we all worked with the same aim. So I hope for a new spring in nature and to a certain extend also in our church. The petition we launched today (thanks, Sigrid Grabmeier!) will help to make our visions come true.