

UK welcomes election of new Pope Francis

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Pope Francis I is the first to hail from Latin America

British politicians and religious leaders have welcomed the election of Jorge Bergoglio, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, as the new Pope,

David Cameron said it was a "momentous day" for Catholics around the world.

Archbishop of Westminster Vincent Nichols, head of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, said the election was a moment of "great joy".

And the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said he looked forward to working with Pope Francis.

Cardinal Bergoglio was elected pontiff on the fifth ballot on Wednesday in the papal conclave in Rome.

The 76-year old is the first pontiff to come from Latin America and his election follows the retirement of Pope Benedict XVI last month.

No 10 said it was "a momentous day for the 1.2 billion Catholics around the world".

'Inspired choice'

The Catholic Church in England and Wales issued a statement welcoming the election of Pope Francis.

"On behalf of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, I wish to express my great joy at the news of the election of Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, S.J. [Socius Jesu - ie a member of the Jesuits] as the 265th Successor of St Peter and Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church," Archbishop Nichols said.

"As he begins his new Apostolic ministry, as the Bishop of Rome and Shepherd of the universal Church, Pope Francis I may be assured of the prayers and loving support of the Catholic community throughout England and Wales."

Archbishop Nichols expressed his "great joy" at the election.

His predecessor Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor said it was an "inspired choice" and the Church was "very blessed".

Describing Pope Francis as a "humble, spiritual and very intelligent" man with an instinctive feel for the poor, Cardinal Murphy O'Connor said his election "may have been a surprise" but it was an "inspired choice".

"He will bring a new kind of style of to the Catholic Church," he said. "His own simplicity of life will be a great example to the whole world."

The election of a Pope from Latin America, he added, reflected the fact that the Catholic Church "was a global Church in a way that it has never been before" and "this man understands that".

Archbishop Philip Tartaglia of Glasgow, president of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland, said he was "surprised that the conclave was so quick. It took hardly any longer than the election of Benedict XVI.

"Given the pre-Conclave situation, and the absence of a single dominant figure, I can only see this quick result as God's work.

"As soon as I heard I went into my chapel and offered a grateful and joyful prayer of thanksgiving."

'Bonds of understanding'

Archbishop Welby, the Anglican primate of All England, said the choice of a new pontiff was of "great significance to Christians everywhere, not least Anglicans".

"We wish Pope Francis every blessing in the enormous responsibilities that he has assumed on behalf of Roman Catholics around the world.

"We have long since recognized and often reaffirmed that our churches hold a special place for one another. I look forward to meeting Pope Francis, and to walking and working together to build on the consistent legacy of our predecessors."

He added: "Pope Francis is well known as a compassionate pastor of real stature who has served the poor in Latin America, and whose simplicity and holiness of life is remarkable. He is an evangelist, sharing the love of Christ which he himself knows."

Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond offered Pope Francis his "warmest congratulations".

"I wish him well in his time in the Papacy, and his first message as Pope - urging greater bonds of understanding and co-operation among peoples and nations - is one that should resonate around the globe."