

Why Don't We Have a Pope?

by Tal Davis

"Mom, who is our pope?" asked 11-year-old Carmen.

"Who is our what?" her mom replied with surprise.

"Our pope. Consuela, next door, said her church got a new pope last year. So I was wondering who's our pope?"

Who's Your Leader?

Carmen's question is good. She and her family are members of a Baptist church. Her friend, Consuela, is a Roman Catholic. In April 2005, the Roman Catholic Church selected a new leader for its more than one billion members around the world. They call their leader "pope" which means "Papa" or "Father." The current pope is named Benedict XVI.

Popes usually serve until their deaths.

The world headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church is located in a section of Rome, Italy, called the Vatican. Roman Catholics in every country of the world look to the pope and other leaders in the Vatican to determine their beliefs and practices.

Carmen was surprised when her mother answered, "Honey, we don't have a pope. As Baptists we don't have a worldwide structure with a highest leader or

headquarters. Local church members decide who will be their leaders."

"But I thought we are part of the Southern Baptist Convention. It doesn't have a pope?" Once again a good question from Carmen.

"No," said Mom. "The Southern Baptist Convention includes American and Canadian churches who choose to join. The convention president is elected each year but does not have authority over the churches. He gives spiritual leadership and encourages the churches to work together to support missions and service agencies."

Other Differences

"What other things do we believe differently than Consuela's church?" Carmen asked.

Roman Catholic and Baptist

beliefs about God and Jesus are similar. But they disagree on a number of important points. One difference is the way their members seek salvation. Roman Catholics teach that going to heaven requires a person be baptized in her church, take the Lord's Supper as often as possible, and regularly tell her sins to church ministers called priests.

"The Bible teaches," Carmen's mom affirmed, "that salvation is received only by telling your sins to God, desiring to turn away from your sins, and putting your trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Baptism and the Lord's Supper don't save us but are pictures to remind us what Jesus did for us by His death on the cross and His resurrection."

"I see," nodded Carmen. "I guess we have everything we need in Jesus!"

"That's right," said Mom. "Everything we need is in Jesus." 

Salvation is received by putting your trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord.