

*An  
American  
Cardinal*

*The Biography of Cardinal Timothy Dolan*

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*For my mother: for her selfless love, support, and encouragement. And for my father:  
whose wise words still guide me.*

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## PREFACE

Cardinal Timothy Dolan came bounding down the stairs of his Madison Avenue residence wearing black pants with suspenders and a gray polo shirt. “So, what’s this project you’re working on?” he asked, settling into the seat opposite me. This was our first one-on-one meeting after I had been commissioned to write his biography, so I started to explain how it all came about, going over phrases I’d rehearsed vaguely in my head. “Do you want anything to drink? Coffee? Water?” he interrupted. “Water would be great, thanks.” His director of communications, Joseph Zwilling, motioned he would get it. “Your Eminence, do you want anything?” he asked politely. Dolan looked up and without hesitation replied, “I’ll have a Coors Light.”

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About an hour and a half earlier I’d been seated in a pew inside St. Patrick’s Cathedral listening to Cardinal Dolan’s Sunday morning homily. He was holding the attention of maybe two thousand people as he spoke about not being afraid to stand up and defend your faith. He was skillfully making an earlier Bible reading relevant to his audience. First he recounted meeting some New York University students at a dedication ceremony for the new Cardinal Egan Catholic Center the night before. They “radiate the faith” on the campus, he said, and aren’t afraid to defend their views. Then he told a tale that struck closer to home. As a teen, his father worked as a part-time barman in Missouri to bring in some extra cash. One evening, his dad had just served a beer to an African American man when he overheard two white regulars talking. “There was a great day when that man would not have been welcome here,” they said. “And the reason our country is changing is because of those G.D. knee-bending Catholics.” (Dolan abbreviated the word *goddamn* to *G.D.*)

“My dad was a very religious man, but you wouldn’t call him a Shiite Catholic,” Dolan told the rapt congregation. “He was kind of very humble and behind the scenes in his faith. He kind of rose up and he went down to them and he said, ‘Fellas, I happen to be one of those G.D. knee-bending Catholics, and I happen to be very proud

of the teaching of my church that all men and women are created equal. And I happen to be rather proud of the posture of my church in the Civil Rights movement, and his business is highly appreciated here. Yours isn't. Get out of here." It was a simple story, told in simple terms, but the point had been made. His blue-collar dad had defended his beliefs and all the Catholics sitting in the pews should not be afraid to, either.

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As Mass ended I was led toward the back of the cathedral, where streams of well-wishers lined up to meet the cardinal. There was a tour group from Rockland County who erupted into loud laughter as Dolan cracked a joke while posing for a photograph with them. Then an Irish woman approached and started sobbing as they spoke in close, hushed tones. The cardinal's priest-secretary, Father Jim Cruz, was prompted to bring over holy water, and Dolan blessed her. Next came the young man on the brink of getting married who had attended Mass with three friends. He was eager to hear a quick, reassuring word from New York's Catholic leader. Dolan moved from situation to situation with patience and ease, resting his big heavy hand on one person's shoulder before putting his arm around another. Eventually his staff signaled it was time for him to leave and attempted to steer him away, to limited success because Dolan was in constant demand. Clearly long accustomed to assuming the role of killjoys, they persevered and eventually got their way.

An inconspicuous door at the back of St. Patrick's Cathedral leads to a narrow staircase and directly into Dolan's private residence. The cardinal was carrying his big gold crosier, wearing long green vestments, and had a pointed green miter on his head. He is a large man in both height and girth and, as I was invited to pass through the entrance ahead of him, I glanced back. I was struck by how imposing and regal he looked. "Wait down here a moment while I go and get changed," he said as soon as we stepped into his home. While we waited, Zwilling gave me a tour of the reception rooms. The white papal chair Pope Benedict XVI used during his 2008 visit was displayed prominently against one wall. The carpeted staircase leading to Dolan's study and living quarters was lined with large commissioned portraits of all his predecessors at the New York archdiocese, and there were icons and relics all over the walls. Just to the left of the front door, which opens onto Madison Avenue, hung the framed edict declaring Timothy Dolan a cardinal, signed with Pope Benedict's small, neat scrawl. On a table directly beneath it three red hats had been placed in a triangle. Front and center was the three-pointed cardinal's biretta Dolan had received in Saint

Peter's Basilica in Vatican City seven months prior. To the right and left were souvenirs linked to Dolan's second passion in life: baseball caps. One for the New York Yankees and the other for his childhood team, the St. Louis Cardinals. In the living room I spotted another personal sporting keepsake: a baseball signed by the St. Louis Cardinals legend Stan Musial, inscribed: "One cardinal to another." It was impressive and imposing until Cardinal Dolan came striding back down the stairs to sit opposite me and swig his cold beer. "Do you want a glass?" Zwilling asked his boss. "No, you know me," Dolan replied, sipping straight from the bottle. It was impossible not to find this man fascinating.

"So, how can we help?" Dolan continued. "You should get a trip out of this when I go to Ireland or Rome. You want to follow me around for the day?" I managed to get a word in that yes, I would like to do all of the above. "Sure," he said. "I'm flattered." He apologized and explained that he couldn't chat for very long, as he had family in town waiting on the veranda for him. "In fact," he said after a second's hesitation, "you should come and meet them because you'll want to speak to them at some stage." We rose, and Dolan led me onto the terrace, his arm around my shoulder, and introduced me to his sister-in-law, his niece Caitlin, and the other family friends. "She's writing a book about me," he told them as we all shook hands. "For the record, I don't drink Manhattans," he told me. "That's been written about me before. I drink whiskey, but I never drink Manhattans. Make sure you don't put that."

Minutes later I was standing outside the main doors to the cardinal's residence on a bustling Madison Avenue with people and cars whizzing past. The whirlwind introduction was over. I pulled my phone from my bag and called my mother, explaining that the meeting was certainly unlike anything I had prepared myself for, but I thought the cardinal was on board and I had a feeling this project was going to be a lot of fun.

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I have interviewed more than one hundred people in the course of researching and writing this book and sat down with Dolan multiple times. He is an incredibly busy man but made himself far more accessible and open to my endless lines of questioning than I ever could have hoped he would be. Anyone I reached out to was given the green light to speak to me, if they so desired. And Dolan gave me lists of people from various stages in his life who might be useful to speak to. We chatted in his twentieth-floor office in the Archdiocese of New York Catholic Center while he devoured a

bowlful of popcorn. We toured his private living quarters, where baseball caps are dotted around and photos of his family and mentors cover every spare inch of wall. He showed me his chapel, where he sits quietly every morning, flicking through index cards scribbled with the names of people he's been asked to pray for. We walked through his study, where a large plate, piled high with signed baseballs, adorns a small table at the end of his desk. He also showed me his makeshift exercise room with an elliptical machine and bicycle, where he listens to Spanish tapes while trying to keep his weight in check.

True to his word, Dolan allowed me to follow him around for a couple of days to get a sense for his daily routine as head of the Archdiocese of New York. We started at the seven A.M. Mass in St. Patrick's Cathedral one Wednesday in January before heading to the Catholic Center on First Avenue, the administrative hub of the archdiocese. His boardroom meetings typically began with an off-the-cuff one-liner, which put the room at ease, followed by a short prayer, reminiscent of a family saying grace before diving into a meal. During one meeting with department heads, Dolan listened attentively to the reports by each person present while reluctantly ingesting spoonfuls of a cottage cheese concoction his dietician had instructed him to eat. He has long had a habit of doling out nicknames and jokingly referred to her as the "fat lady"—a reference to his size, not hers. Then he turned to his chief financial officer, William Whiston: "Dollar Bill, what have you got for me?" It was no coincidence this was also the nickname for Missouri-born NBA player Bill Bradley. Sporting references rarely, if ever, pass Dolan by.

Dolan's day was consumed by myriad back-to-back discussions around a conference table or in the more private confines of his office, with his one-hour weekly live radio show on SiriusXM's The Catholic Channel squeezed in between. His long afternoon drew to an end with a presentation by the Pro-Life Commission, where he stared each speaker in the eye and leaned forward attentively in his leather office chair as they spoke, unconsciously playing with the large gold crucifix around his neck.

It was abundantly clear that Dolan liked to keep things moving. When a meeting dragged on too long, he would fidget restlessly and playfully poke the person seated next to him or whisper in their ear. He grasped concepts swiftly and could impressively summarize complex issues in a matter of sentences, cutting to the core of the issue at hand. Still, there remained a boyish playfulness about Cardinal Dolan's persona, an informality despite his title. He seemed genuinely baffled to discover I

found the day interesting when he clearly would far have preferred to have been anywhere other than a boardroom table.

Late in my first day watching Dolan in work mode, he wrapped up his responsibilities at the Catholic Center and turned to his evening agenda: attending a fund-raiser. Dolan skillfully worked his way from top to bottom of the long, narrow room, talking to one guest while placing his hand on the next person's shoulder to draw them into the conversation, enabling himself to keep moving on. Despite the throngs gravitating in his direction to grab a quick word, and with his closest aides looking on and chuckling, Dolan got his hands on a bottle of beer within minutes of arriving. He only had time for a couple of sips before giving a brief off-the-cuff speech, weaving in a personal anecdote from a conversation he'd had only moments earlier, and then he politely took his leave to attend a wake.

Early the next morning, Dolan was on the road again, charming children and adults alike as he walked the corridor of St. Joseph's School of Yorkville on East Eighty-seventh Street before pausing for an interview with a local TV reporter while chewing a mouthful of cookies. In the car ride there he had planned a celebration for a nun who had been in the same parish for sixty years and had coordinated his schedule for upcoming trips to Dallas and Washington, D.C. On the journey back to the Catholic Center, he dictated an op-ed for *The Wall Street Journal*, laying out the archdiocese's reasoning behind recent school closures while his director of communications took notes and his superintendent of schools weighed in with any pertinent points. Dolan was the consummate multitasker.

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Toward the end of the two days at the Archdiocese of New York, I hadn't had a huge amount of one-on-one time with the cardinal, and as he headed to his barbershop, he asked if I wanted to jump in for the ride. Of course, I said yes. As his driver navigated us through the busy Manhattan streets, I asked him about his childhood, about the tape recordings his father sent to him in Rome when he was studying for the priesthood and painfully homesick. As I mentioned the multitude of people I had spoken to who had memorable stories about him, Dolan said, "Well, I hope you interview people that don't like me, there's a couple of those." I told him I'd been trying. "Heck, I'll tell you the weak points. That's why critics never bother me: because I'm a tougher critic of myself than they are."

As we pulled up to the tiny Kips Bay barbershop tucked away between Madison

and Park Avenues and run by a family from Uzbekistan, Dolan slid back the side door of his vehicle and waved into the store. “Are you ready?” he bellowed. They enthusiastically beckoned him inside. I sat and made casual banter as Dolan had the hair on his head and inside his nostrils trimmed. He explained how he first stumbled across the barbershop during his regular Saturday morning walk, when he covers eighty blocks before swinging past the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi to line up for confession. It’s been a regular fixture ever since. By the time he gets home at about 9:30 A.M.: “I’m on top of the world. I’m a new man.”

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If there is one phrase about Cardinal Dolan I have heard more than any other during the course of my research, it is “what you see is what you get.” Time and again, people explained how when they first met him they had doubts about his sincerity. Wary priests in Milwaukee referred to him as the “smiling steamroller” when he first arrived as archbishop. He exudes such energy and joy in public it naturally leads people to question if he maintains that demeanor in private. They wondered if this was somehow simply a well-rehearsed act. Those close to him eventually came to realize it is his natural disposition; he really is that optimistic and he really is that jovial. However, when the situation dictates, he won’t shy away from a fight to defend his values, yet he has a gift for making the disagreement about principles rather than personality. I also heard people say repeatedly that had he not entered the priesthood, he could have been a successful politician. He has the brains, he has the people skills, and he has the deep-seated convictions and ideology. Cardinal Dolan has clearly learned to cultivate those skills over the years. He knows that by cracking a joke he can disarm people or steer an uncomfortable line of questioning in a different direction, and by staying true to his humble beginnings, he becomes accessible and approachable to ordinary people. By reaching out and hugging those he meets, laughing with them and crying with them, he strips away the pomp and circumstance usually associated with his position, and he has the ability to make people excited to be Catholic once again—no small feat, given the tumult the church has been through in recent decades. There are some critics who feel that his insistence on doggedly fighting about so-called “pelvic issues”—gay marriage, abortion, and contraception—is a distraction from the issues real Catholics should be focusing their energies toward: eradicating poverty and homelessness, and ending war.

I visited Maryhouse, in Manhattan’s East Village, the home of the Catholic

Worker's movement, which was established in 1933 by social activist Dorothy Day. Dolan is championing efforts to have Day named a saint, and while they are hugely appreciative of his support, the staff feels the world he occupies remains far removed from their daily struggle. Of course, there are also those on the other end of the spectrum. Many lay Catholics think he panders too much to people, especially Catholic politicians who pursue legislation that runs counter to their core values. And inevitably, there are people who come from outside his faith and disagree with him entirely.

Regardless of which side of the fence you fall on with Cardinal Dolan, it is indisputable that he is a man who has rewritten the rule book frequently through his career. He became rector of the North American College in 1994 despite having served as vice-rector at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in St. Louis for only two years. He returned from seven years in Rome to become the youngest auxiliary bishop in St. Louis in 2001. Less than a year later, he was made the youngest archbishop in the country and put in charge of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, one of the most challenging nationwide. Soon after his appointment to New York in 2009, he was elected president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, marking the first time the vice president had stood for the position and not been appointed. Three months later he was elevated to cardinal several months before his predecessor in New York, Cardinal Edward Egan, turned eighty and thereby became too old to vote in a papal conclave. It's typically unheard of for an archdiocese to have two cardinals under eighty at any one time since if the papacy was to become vacant unexpectedly, that archdiocese would be represented twice during the vote inside the Sistine Chapel. At the time of his elevation in 2012, Dolan was handpicked by Pope Benedict to deliver a speech to the College of Cardinals on New Evangelization, a clear sign the ailing pontiff saw him as a bright hope for the future. And, during the 2013 conclave, Vatican experts seriously wondered if he could become the first American pope.

This is the story about how a young boy from a small rural Missouri town grew up to become one of the most prominent Catholics in the world.

## **PRELUDE: CONCLAVE**

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2013**

The blades of the white helicopter started to rotate with Pope Benedict XVI settled comfortably inside the cabin. In just three hours, his eight-year reign as leader of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics would officially end. The frail eighty-five-year-old had just left his papal apartment and said farewell to his staff, many of whom bowed to kiss his gold fisherman's ring in one last show of deference. The day before, Benedict had said farewell to the public in Saint Peter's Square, Vatican City. Earlier that morning, he had a final audience with the College of Cardinals inside Clementine Hall, a reception room where the pope's body usually lies in state. He had thanked his brother cardinals for their service and pledged obedience to his successor. Now, as five P.M. rolled around, Benedict was taking flight from Vatican City and would soon assume the title of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. His ring would be destroyed, along with his papal seal, and he would set aside his red leather shoes. Many of the staff on the helipad were visibly moved by the solemnity of the occasion and all were swept up in the unprecedented nature of the event. For the first time in nearly six hundred years, here was a pontiff stepping aside as leader of the Catholic world instead of dying in the position. It was both poignant and surreal.

The bells of Saint Peter's Basilica were chiming loudly by the time the rotating helicopter blades gathered enough pace to make the aircraft lift. A couple thousand people had gathered in the square, and their eyes were glued to the two large screens broadcasting all the action on the helipad. The crowd was a mixture of the devout and the curious. Dozens of nuns and priests stood alone or in small groups quietly murmuring prayers and running rosary beads through their fingers. Tourists from all parts of the world stood solemnly among them, soaking up the atmosphere and lifting cameras into the air to capture a keepsake. It seemed like the Italian locals had come out to bear witness also. One chicly dressed elderly couple stood arm in arm toward the back of the crowd. The woman's eyes were full of tears and she was too choked up to speak.

There was still time for one last lap of honor. As Benedict's helicopter took flight, the pilot directed it on a path over Saint Peter's Square. All eyes looked up for the brief flyby. Many waved, others cheered, one handwritten sign pointed to the sky simply read: DANKE!!! Then a pensive silence fell over the crowd as people turned back to the screens to watch the remainder of the unprecedented journey.

Benedict was en route to Castel Gandolfo, the stunning papal summer residence fifteen miles southeast of Rome. The sprawling villa with high walls and manicured lawns is set within a beautiful little town full of narrow, winding cobbled streets overlooking a lake. It was here that Benedict planned to begin dedicating the rest of his days to prayer, well out of the public eye. The small plaza in front of the main gates was at capacity by the time the helicopter touched down fifteen minutes later. People had been gathering all day, waiting for the world's very last glimpse of Benedict as pope. He emerged onto the balcony with arms outstretched to address the crowd. "You know this day is different for me than the preceding ones: I am no longer the Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church, or I will be until eight o'clock this evening and then no more," he said. "I am simply a pilgrim beginning the last leg of his pilgrimage on this Earth." After the short address he turned and stepped slowly out of view.

On the roof of the Pontifical North American College, the elite seminary school for men from the United States, situated a short walk up the hill from Saint Peter's Square, a group had also gathered to wave Benedict good-bye. Among them was Cardinal Timothy Dolan, New York's larger-than-life Catholic leader. At eight the previous morning, his eight-and-a-half-hour Alitalia flight direct from JFK had touched down at Leonardo da Vinci Airport in Rome. Wearing his black flat cap and a long black coat, he stepped through the arrivals terminal and was back in the city he had lived in for more than a decade throughout the course of his life. He was in the Holy See to say good-bye to the man who gave him his red three-pointed biretta and the opportunity to vote in his first conclave. Long before he arrived in Europe, Dolan had been touted as a *papabile*—the local term for a papal contender—but he continued to laugh off the notion with a big, hearty laugh and his characteristic wit. "I'd say those [suggestions] are only from people smoking marijuana," he'd told a reporter after his last Sunday Mass in St. Patrick's Cathedral before heading to the Italian capital.

Dolan had been as surprised as any by Benedict's announcement on February 11, which was delivered in Latin to an audience of cardinals who had gathered to discuss an entirely different matter of church business. After getting confirmation that the

news was in fact true, Dolan had walked over to the *Today* show studios at Rockefeller Center, across Fifth Avenue from St. Patrick's Cathedral, to talk on air with cohost Matt Lauer. Shortly after, he met with a gaggle of press who looked to him for answers when he had none. "I'm not kidding, I was very startled, and I don't know what to say," he told the media. "I myself am waiting for information, for instructions, as to what we would do now as the College of Cardinals and boy, as soon as I find out I'll let you know." When they asked him about his chances of taking the top job he said it was "highly improbable," then glanced down at a reporter crouching at his feet in the scrum. "Is that why you're kneeling?" he joked, and that line of questioning dissipated with the laughter. Now he was finally in Rome and, as Benedict's helicopter passed by, Dolan cheered and waved with the rest of the crowd, who spontaneously started singing "Ad Multos Annos," meaning, "To Many Years."

At eight p.m., the bells of Saint Peter's Basilica chimed and the Catholic world was officially without a pope. Small clusters of people were holding vigils around the square. Among them was a group of students from Minnesota who had congregated near the central obelisk, where they had been reading from the Gospel, reciting the rosary, and singing hymns until shortly before the top of the hour, when they dropped to their knees and fell silent. A large crowd had gathered around them and the air was cool and still. The only movement came from the flames of the candles gently flickering in their hands. As the Catholic world mourned the untimely loss of one leader, thoughts quickly turned to the future and the upcoming conclave. "We are praying for the cardinals right now that they listen to the Holy Spirit," a twenty-one-year-old among the group said. "And [for them to] make a wise decision for the future pope." The notion of an American pontiff did seem far-fetched, but there were some who started to wonder: "What if?"

### **SUNDAY, MARCH 3, 2013**

Dolan walked into Saint Peter's Basilica as the first rays of sunlight cast a red-tinged hue across the façade. Despite the early hour, several of the altars inside the vast church were already occupied. At some, small groups knelt in solemn prayer; at others priests said Mass all alone. The basilica was tranquil and void of the usual hum of visitors at this time of day, allowing it to feel like a place of worship, not a stop on the tourist map. Dolan and his small entourage headed to a chapel in the grottoes beneath the ground floor of the basilica dedicated to Our Lady, Queen of the Hungarians. It is located next to the tomb of Pope Paul VI and, as he would soon tell the congregation,

plucking a phrase from his vast repertoire of sporting analogies, “just a nine-iron shot from the tomb of Saint Peter.”

Saying Mass inside Saint Peter’s is on the cardinal’s “to do” list every time he visits Rome, but this intimate service was a far cry from the one he had given one week before. The previous Sunday, Dolan had said his usual 10:15 A.M. Mass at the altar of St. Patrick’s Cathedral on Manhattan’s Fifth Avenue in front of a few thousand worshippers. Today there were about twenty invited guests in the pews, including some members of the media who had flown to Rome to report on the conclave and follow Dolan’s every move closely. He urged those present to realize they were there because of Benedict’s resignation but never to forget that the practice of celebrating Mass transcended that. “The life of the church goes on,” he said with a calm and reassuring sense of authority. “The life of the church centers around what we’re doing right now.”

As a man accustomed to making use of all his time, Dolan was keen to get things moving. This was his fifth day in Vatican City and he had already taken care of many formalities. He had said farewell to Benedict both en masse during his final general audience in Saint Peter’s Square and in private during the pontiff’s meeting with the College of Cardinals on the morning of his last day in power. The cardinals had all lined up for a brief one-on-one chat inside Clementine Hall, and Dolan had used his turn to ask Benedict if he would “please still try and write.” Benedict was a master church theologian who spent decades in academia before donning his white papal vestments. “He didn’t say yes or no,” Dolan later confessed. “At least he heard me say it.” Dolan had also sat down with the press, who were clamoring for interviews; visited a friend in the hospital; and was treating the New York seminarians and priests from the North American College to lunch that afternoon at one of his favorite haunts, Restaurant Abruzzi, near the national monument to Victor Emmanuel II, Altare della Patria, in downtown Rome. He had even made time to phone back to New York to check in, leaving a voice mail for the head of the Priests’ Council inquiring: “How are things, priest-wise?” His concern for his flock and his responsibilities as leader of the New York Archdiocese were never far from his mind. But now the enormity of the task ahead was finally starting to dawn on him. “To think that this boy from Ballwin is going to be participating in it—wow,” he said. “I kind of waver from high-intensity interest to awe and intimidation.” The time had arrived to shift focus to the real reason they were all in Rome: setting a date for the conclave and electing a new pope. “I’m eager to get started,” he said. “Let’s go. Let’s get home.”

## **MONDAY, MARCH 4, 2013**

A man with graying hair and a purposeful stride headed toward the Paul VI gate to the side of Saint Peter's Basilica. It was a crisp, clear morning in early spring, and he wore a black fedora on his head and a long black overcoat. The rosary beads dangling from his right hand and the red trim of the cassock visible at his ankles were the only giveaways. Here was a cardinal on his way to the first of the pre-conclave meetings, known as General Congregations. As soon as the throngs of media clocked him, they surged forward to pepper him with questions. He kept his head down and marched on quietly without comment. Moments later, another cardinal came into view, and the journalists swiftly directed their attention to him instead, hoping for better luck. Within seconds the man had disappeared from view amid a sea of cameras and microphones as questions were fired in an array of European languages.

This frenzied scene played out for more than half an hour as the princes of the church arrived at New Synod Hall for the first of the General Congregations. Dolan and the other American cardinals successfully avoided the scrum by being shuttled in a minibus from the North American College, while many others arrived by car. Those who arrived on foot, however, continued to be mobbed. A few stopped to share their thoughts. "This is not about party alliance," Parisian cardinal André Vingt-Trois explained. "It's about finding the person that has the personality most adaptable to the position." Personally he wanted someone "pastoral, spiritual, capable," he said. Could it be an American? "Everything is possible," came the response. "There is someone in there who does not know he is going to be pope in a few days—he will find out."

By nine A.M. the cardinals were in their seats inside the hall, which resembled a large lecture theater, and were invited to the stage one by one to take an oath of secrecy on the Bible. They would meet every morning and some afternoons throughout the week, and each man had an opportunity to address the entire group, even those cardinals over the age of eighty who were no longer eligible to vote in a conclave but were present to impart their wisdom to the younger generation. Views were aired on a multitude of topics, including the Vatican bureaucracy, known as the Curia, and the scandal surrounding leaked Vatican documents that exposed widespread corruption and rivalry in its highest ranks. Of course, the main priority was determining the qualities needed in the next pope. Finding a pontiff to promote New Evangelization was also an oft-repeated phrase, as the cardinals were looking for someone who could attract lapsed Catholics back to the faith. Of the 115 cardinal-electors, twenty-eight had been elevated to cardinal in the past twelve months, and

some barely knew each other's names. These General Congregations were therefore a vital opportunity for the men to get to know one another. However, it was during the more intimate chats during the coffee breaks with espressos and biscotti, as well as the lunches and dinners behind closed doors, that the real maneuvering and opinion making took place.

Having been elevated into the exclusive club of cardinals only the previous February, Dolan considered himself something of a rookie. He had little time to really consider whom he would vote for before arriving in Rome, and he eagerly took on board advice from the elders among the American camp like Cardinal Edward Egan, his predecessor in New York. "Listen a lot, and meet as many cardinals as you can," they told him, and, "speak candidly to the cardinals you trust." He took their pearls of wisdom to heart. The American cardinals, eleven of whom were eligible to vote, were a tight-knit group and second only to the Italians in terms of numbers. As such, they wielded significant power. They already knew each other well and would meet nearly every night in the North American College, where they were all staying. Inside the red room, reserved for faculty and guests, they met to have frank discussions about what had transpired during that day's General Congregation. "Who are you really leaning toward? Who really impresses or inspires you?" they would ask each other. "We were very blunt with one another and helpful to one another, enlightening," Dolan said. During the week they also invited cardinals from other nations to join them at their dinner table, or accepted a request to dine at another residence. These afforded more opportunities to make inquiries, take in different viewpoints, and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of various emerging frontrunners. "People would go around," Dolan would later explain. "Are there caucuses at any of these meetings? No. But is there a lot of conversation, and just good fraternal conversation? Yup."

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This was the first conclave in a world of rampant social media, where the demand for fresh information was relentless. Already, at least five thousand journalists representing more than a thousand news organizations from sixty-five countries had arrived in Rome. As the conclave drew nearer and the grip of secrecy tightened on the proceedings, journalists turned their attention with increased fervor to speculating who would emerge on the balcony dressed in white. Unlike the previous conclave, when then-cardinal Ratzinger was the clear favorite going in, the field of possible *papabili* this time was vast. Italian cardinal Angelo Sodano was seen as one to watch, though

perhaps too akin to the old guard at a time many felt serious reform was needed. Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana was being touted as a contender to become the first black pope, and Cardinal Odilo Pedro Scherer of Brazil was a leading name from the developing world. Then there was Canadian cardinal Marc Ouellet, who had the intellect, experience, and language skills, but perhaps was too cerebral to bring about the necessary tough reforms. The list went on.

Dolan's name had been continuously floated around among the American press. He had long been nicknamed "America's Pope," but the idea of electing a pontiff from a superpower had never gained much traction. However, toward the end of the week, an attitude shift started to take effect as the Italian media began paying increasing attention to Dolan also. Italy's fourth-largest daily, *Il Messaggero*, said the Holy See might be warming up to the idea: "If the church's New Evangelization will come through a smile, not a frown, maybe Dolan is the best candidate of all," the paper wrote. Veteran Vatican reporter Sandro Magister called Dolan the "consummate candidate." "For the first time in the bimillennial history of the church, the successor of Peter could come from the Americas. Or to hazard a more targeted prediction: from the Big Apple," he wrote. Italy's *La Repubblica* said Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, an influential player, was working hard behind the scenes to advance Dolan's chances. And Cardinal Camillo Ruini, another big hitter who was too old to vote in the conclave, was reportedly making moves to drum up support for team Dolan.

There were questions about whether Dolan's language skills were adequate for such a global role as his Italian was not completely fluent, and he spoke only halting Spanish and no French or Latin. Others said he lacked sufficient Vatican experience, and for some he seemed too brash and, quite simply, too American. "If Dolan is elected, the other five thousand bishops of the world might as well take the next fifteen years off, because they'll never be seen or heard from again," one church-watcher said. But Dolan had clearly won the popular vote. People were also impressed with the informal style of the American camp as well as their attempts at transparency, so with no clear front-runner, it left open the possibility that a big surprise could be around the corner. "It would represent the overcoming of the ineligibility of a 'Yankee' cardinal," *Corriere della Sera* reporter Massimo Franco wrote about Dolan's chances. "It would mean the radical reform of the Curia. And the adoption of a skilled and extroverted communicator: even too much, according to the critics."

There certainly were those critics vehemently against the idea of a pope from New York. Representatives of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP)

had flown from the United States and walked around Saint Peter's Square, handing out business cards to reporters. They held near-daily press briefings highlighting their concerns about various cardinals and released a "dirty dozen" list of candidates they felt should be disqualified. Dolan was on it, along with fellow American cardinals Seán O'Malley of Boston and Donald Wuerl of Washington, D.C. The group criticized Dolan's handling of the fallout from the sex abuse crisis while he was archbishop of Milwaukee (his post before New York), especially his payment of up to \$20,000 to expedite the removal of priests from ministry. "It isn't really up to SNAP to determine who should participate or not in the conclave," responded Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi, but the group's presence did put the issue of a prelate's track record into the minds of many. It was something Dolan had dealt with in his two prior assignments, Milwaukee and St. Louis, and it continued to follow him. One week before he boarded the plane to Rome, he had spent three hours giving a legal deposition in New York about his decision to publicly name priests who had molested children in Milwaukee. It was part of ongoing bankruptcy hearings involving the archdiocese, as two years after Dolan left in 2009, his successor filed for Chapter 11, saying financial claims by victims far outstripped the church's funds.

Despite the critics, there was still no denying Dolan was attracting attention and positive media wherever he went. Many saw him as a breath of fresh air, a formidable communicator, and one of the biggest proponents of New Evangelization. "One dynamic in this conclave would be the Vatican old guard versus those who want a shake-up of established ways," respected church analyst John Allen said. "Dolan is emerging as one of the candidates in the second camp." He would be "breaking a mold," Allen continued. "All options are on the table." By the end of the week, Dolan's name had started to flash up on every news outlet's shortlist of candidates. Bookmakers had him as a long shot at 33/1 or 50/1, while hundreds of TV stations, magazines, blogs, and newspapers from Asia, Australia, Japan, and throughout Europe were requesting a few minutes of his time. During Dolan's four years at the Archdiocese of New York, his press team had never had to cope with interest of this intensity. Cardinal Egan had voted in the previous conclave and there had been interest from the American media, but his appeal had never gone global. This felt like something different.

### **SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 2013**

Cardinal Dolan contemplated not visiting Our Lady of Guadalupe in the Monte Mario

section of Rome for Sunday morning Mass to spare parishioners the inevitable media circus that would ensue. With one week of General Congregations over, every cardinal-electoral was now in Rome, and it had been decided the conclave would begin Tuesday, so every media outlet in the world was trying to get a few last glimpses of the *papabili*. Dolan was still a long shot but undeniably a name on many people's watch list. Despite his concerns about overwhelming the local parishioners, the Vatican press office announced that every cardinal in Rome would be visiting their titular church, the local parish each is assigned upon receiving their red hat. Dolan obediently followed suit. Bemused locals gathered in the sleepy square outside the modest church as reporters, photographers, cameramen, and well-wishers started to arrive a couple of hours before the service. They were unaccustomed to this level of activity on a Sunday morning and wanted to know which celebrity was coming to town. The American cardinal from New York, they were told. The one who smiles a lot.

The one-room church with its earthy-colored façade and yellow and white stained-glass windows shaped into a simple cross is located in a working-class community with a large Mexican population. Dolan pulled up in a black SUV and was set upon the moment he stepped out of his car, but he navigated the crowd effortlessly. "Where are my St. Louis people?" he asked at the sight of a cameraman from his hometown. The parishioners were excited to have Dolan in their church, and he came down the aisle with typical exuberance at the end of a long procession of Italian and American priests. He had been holed up in meetings all week and seemed relieved to be back with the ordinary folk again. He wore pink vestments, waved at everyone he saw, and blessed every child he could lay his hands on. Despite the honor of having the cardinal in their midst, the church retained its humble feel. The altar boys walking in line ahead of Dolan wore crisp long white cassock shirts but their scuffed sneakers poked out at the bottom. "I hope he becomes pope," one parishioner remarked to the woman seated beside her in the wooden pew. "Wouldn't that be beautiful."

"Thank you for coming," Dolan told the standing-room-only crowd in Italian before taking up position at the altar, where he beamed and gave an occasional wink. He explained to the audience of more than three hundred that he wasn't there that morning as a cardinal but as a regular parish priest. "What I wanted to be since my first Holy Communion," at age seven, he told them. As the service neared its end, Dolan teased the locals by saying they were only happy to see him because his homilies are shorter than those of their regular pastor. Then he joked he planned to take the candy brought to the altar as an offering into the conclave with him because