

Former pope Benedict XVI dies aged 95

German predecessor to Pope Francis became first pontiff to step down as head of Catholic church in 600 years

Pope Benedict XVI, who served as leader of the Catholic church from 2005 until his resignation in 2013, died on Saturday aged 95, three days after his successor, Pope Francis, warned the world that he was gravely ill.

The Vatican announced that Francis would preside at Benedict's funeral in St Peter's Square on Thursday. From Monday, his body will lie at St Peter's Basilica to allow the faithful to pay respects.

Benedict's death brings to a close an unprecedented period in recent history where two popes have coexisted, a situation that has caused tensions within rival camps in the Vatican. It eases the way for his successor, Pope Francis, to consider whether to follow Benedict by retiring at some point – impossible while the outcome would have been three popes.

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