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1978

By Religious News Service

It was a year marked by conflict and violence -- assassinations, mass suicide, protest demonstrations, social unrest. Changes of leadership in Churches and governments and some startling cultural trends also marked the period. In many ways, 1978 would be a year to remember for its impact on history.

Two epochal events seemed to highlight the historic changes that occurred in the past 12 months: three papacies in two months and the mass suicides and murders that made the little-known country of Guyana a household word for millions.

But not all of it was negative. The Camp David accords promised new hope for peace in the Middle East. An agreed statement on papal infallibility marked a milestone in Lutheran-Roman Catholic relations.

And, as always, there were new developments on such continuing social problems as the rights of women and minorities, disarmament, and unemployment. Issues like abortion and affirmative action still challenged religious leaders to remain committed to their principles while avoiding infringements on the rights of others.

Pope Paul VI died in August after observing the 15th anniversary of his pontificate and the tenth anniversary of his birth-control encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*. He was succeeded by Cardinal Albino Luciani of Venice, who chose the

names of his two immediate predecessors in calling himself Pope John Paul.

During his shockingly brief reign of 33 days, Pope John Paul I gained a reputation as "the smiling Pope." An ironic event of his papacy was the death of Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Nikodim, a president of the World Council of Churches, who suffered a heart attack during a private audience with the Pope.

After the shock of the death of two Popes in such a short period of time, the Roman Catholic Church gave the world yet another surprise when the College of Cardinals elected a Polish Pope. Cardinal Karol Wojtyla of Cracow had established a reputation as a strong opponent of Communist infringements on religious freedom, and his election was expected to lead to some changes in the Vatican's diplomatic approaches to Communist countries.

Pope John Paul II set a new image of the papacy -- one of youthful vigor and of informality at the same time that he seemed to take a conservative tone on matters of faith and practice, stressing such things as the tradition of priestly celibacy and urging nuns to wear distinctive habits and priests clerical garb in public.

Just when the world had become adjusted to the new Pope, it experienced the almost unbelievable horror of the People's Temple tragedy in Guyana, which began with the murder of Rep. Leo Ryan (D-Calif.) and four other people in his party and ended in the mass murder-suicide of more than

900 persons. The bizarre story of how a minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) could degenerate into the fanatical leader of a dangerous cult raised anew the dilemma of how the U.S. government can investigate or regulate the activities of religious groups without violating the Constitution.

Government efforts to regulate church-operated schools at the state and federal levels drew more fire from Protestants than Roman Catholics this year in the area of educational standards, but all Churches seemed to be opposed to proposed Internal Revenue Service (IRS) standards involving racial integration of such schools. The religious community also joined in virtually unanimous opposition to a proposed lobby disclosure bill, which would have required all groups which attempt to affect national legislation to register and make periodic reports on their activities and expenses. The bill was defeated in committee.

Two measures which had won broad interreligious support were passed by the Congress this year -- the Panama Canal treaties and the Humphrey-Hawkins "full employment" bill, although the latter was considerably weakened from its original form. Tuition tax credit bills found Roman Catholics and most Protestants at opposite sides. While the most publicized measure in the area, the Packwood-Moynihan Bill, was not adopted, both proponents

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Going Up

Construction of St. Josaphat's Church on Ridge Road took the direction last week of erecting the domes that will adorn the top of the structure. There are five domes in all; four depicting apostles and one larger one in the center symbolizing Christ. At right, workers fasten down one of the domes.

Photos by Terrance J. Brennan

