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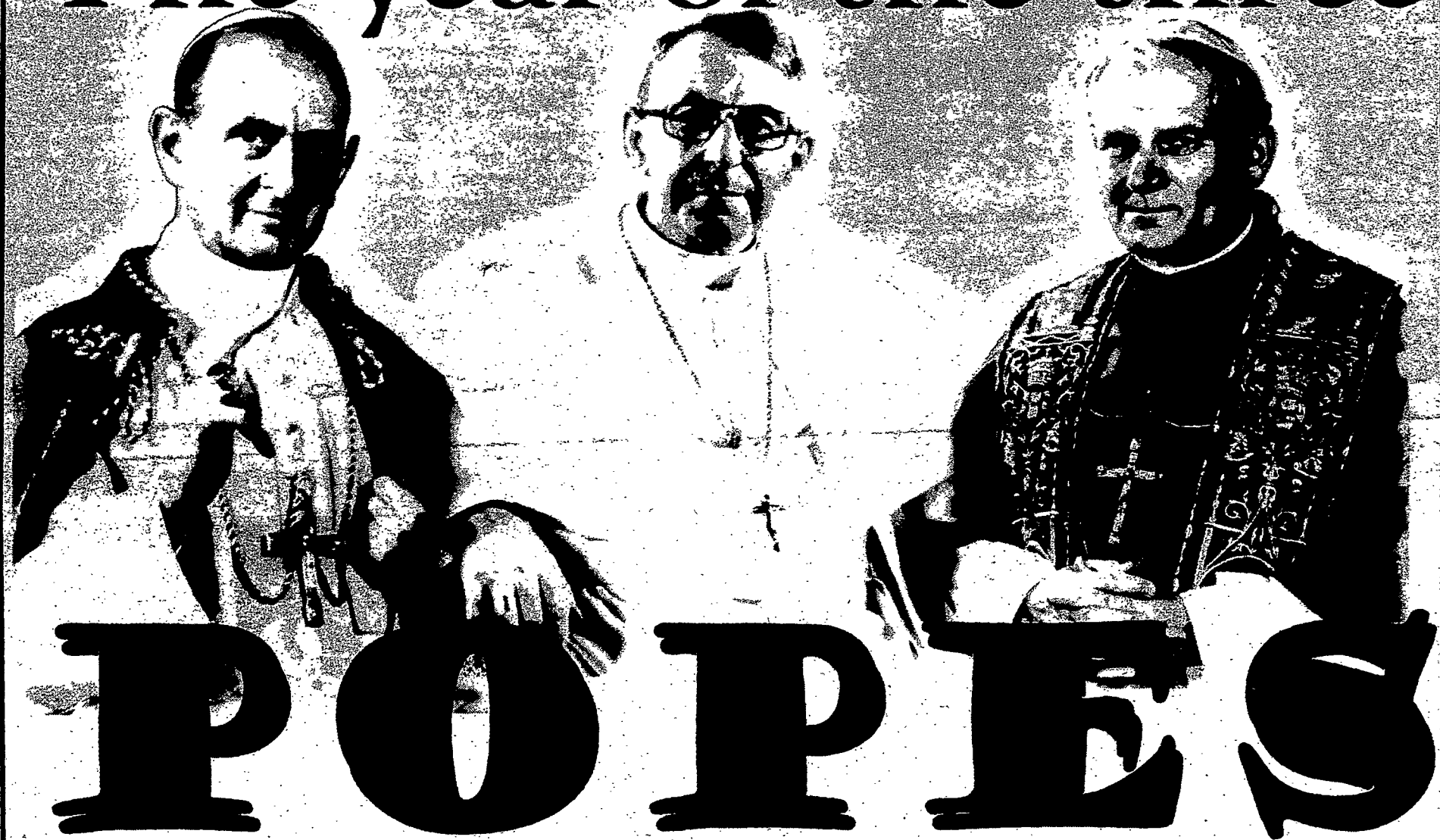
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The year of the three



POPES

In the early evening of Oct. 16, 1978, white smoke arose from the Sistine Chapel chimney to signal that a pope had been elected. Below, in St. Peter's Square, Father Joseph A. Hart waited eagerly to learn the new Holy Father's identity.

"I was standing in the square with Father Matthew Clark from Albany," recalled Father Hart, who was in Rome at the time doing graduate studies at the Gregorian University.

Two decades later, Father Hart serves as a vicar general to "Father Clark" — now better known as Bishop Clark of Rochester.

Bishop Clark's firsthand perspective of this history came about because, during this month 20 years ago, he was spiritual director at North American College in Rome. Less than a year later, the new pontiff would appoint him bishop of Rochester.

The crowd swelled as it awaited the pope's first public appearance that October day. At that point, Bishop Clark recalled, he was awed at the vastness of the Catholic Church.

"There were people from many, many parts of the world there," Bishop Clark said. "I'll never forget the night, just for the beauty of it."

When the pope appeared, he immediately acknowledged that tradition had been broken: He, Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, archbishop of Krakow, Poland, was the first non-Italian pope in nearly 500 years.

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Story by Mike Latona