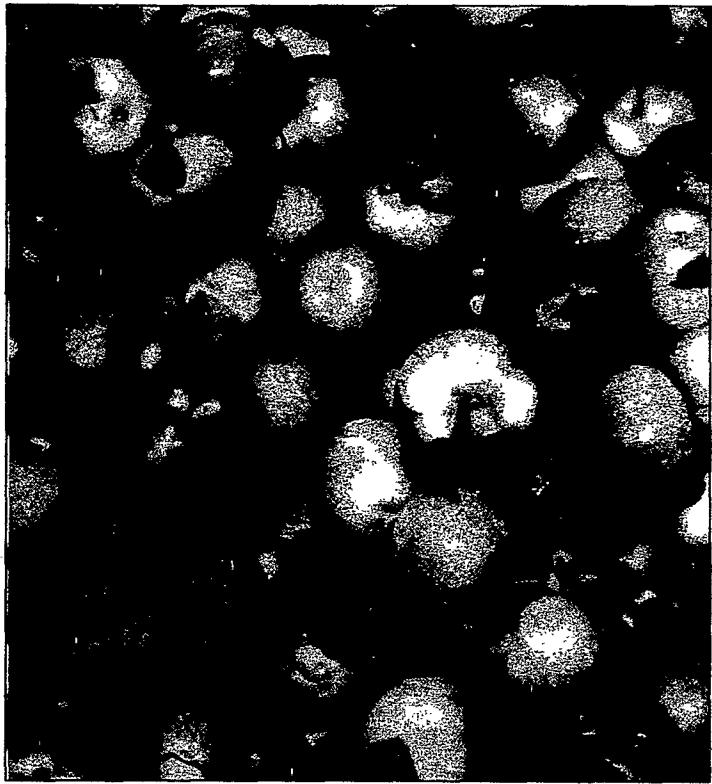


Mixed reviews of pope's 25 years



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Stewardship is enabled by campaign

To the editor:

The articles in the Sept. 4 issue of the *Catholic Courier* "Exploring issues of diversity" and "Habitat plans to build on faith" were uplifting to read. We are truly blessed to have so many parishioners in our diocese so very willing to give of themselves, sharing their talents and time with and for others in need. Isn't this what our faith calls us to be, brother and sister to one another? Are we not all connected?

Reflecting on these articles, I became aware that being good stewards calls us to share our time, talents, and also our treasure. I'm sure most of us at one time or another has given financial help to a child, grandchild, parent or family member, or even maybe helped raise money for a disease or for someone who was in need. If we call our parish church home, and gather on Sunday to pray for one another, and all our brothers and sisters who are the church, then we are indeed family.

The Partners in Faith

campaign is a wonderful way to help the neediest of our family. It supports programs to train laity so that adults, children and our grandchildren can learn and grow in this wonderful faith we share. Wouldn't it be great to know we've had a small part in helping our beloved retired priests, who have given themselves in service to us? These are but a few of the many aspects of Partners in Faith. I strongly urge you to prayerfully consider making a pledge to Partners in Faith if you haven't as yet done so.

This is about people helping people. It's about family helping family with time, talent and treasure.

Pat Waldmiller
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Rochester

On Oct. 16 Pope John Paul II marks the 25th anniversary of his election to the papacy. He is the third-longest-reigning pope in history, only five months behind Leo XIII, and would have to remain in office six years, seven months and three weeks more if he is to surpass Pope Pius IX.

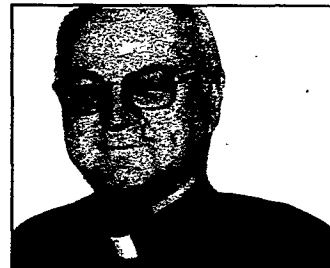
As these lines were being written, the pope had just returned from Slovakia, where he was unable to complete the reading of his opening statement upon arriving in the country, and had to have someone finish his homily at the Mass in which he beatified two local figures, a bishop and a nun who had suffered under communism in the former Czechoslovakia.

Reporters observed that the pope had never looked so fatigued nor acted so feebly as he did on this, his 102nd trip outside the Vatican. Many wondered if it would be his last.

Those who have made dire predictions in the past about his health, capacity to travel and even about his impending death have consistently been proved wrong. At some point in the future, known only to God, those observers will finally be proved right.

Meanwhile, the media and thousands within the church have been taking their measure both of the man and of his long tenure.

In electing Karol Wojtyla, the second conclave of 1978 chose a candidate of immense personal strength and iron will, a man even



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

younger than his 58 years in physical vigor and energy.

His strength and will had been sharpened in sustained personal and official resistance to Nazism and then communism in his native Poland and in his daily round of pastoral responsibilities exercised in the teeth of determined and powerful political opposition.

Following the sudden death of John Paul I after only 33 days in office, the cardinal-electors were in no mood to take any more risks on a less-than-robust figure. Cardinal Wojtyla offered a striking contrast to the mild, small-of-stature John Paul I.

That robust strength and iron will would also characterize the new pope's personal style of governance. Some came to refer to him as a "hard-line" pope — a quality that endeared him to a faction which had been secretly contemptuous of his predecessor, Paul VI. They had faulted him for weakness in the face of dissent and for the apparent drift of the church away from orthodox and traditional dis-

cipline.

Certain progressive cardinals, like Koenig of Austria and Lorscheider of Brazil, had promoted Wojtyla's candidacy expecting him to apply that strength of character and of will to the service of the church behind the Iron Curtain and in the Third World.

Both cardinals admitted some years later that they had not expected him to adopt the same hard line in the governance of the church itself, particularly in his dealings with theologians, appointments of bishops and officers of the Roman Curia, and recentralization of authority in the papacy at the expense of the council's teaching on collegiality.

The church can surely take pride in the many achievements of its pope: his following in the footsteps of John XXIII in taking seriously his primary pastoral role as Bishop of Rome, his ecumenical outreach to separated Eastern churches, his extraordinary initiatives in Jewish-Catholic relations, and his accelerating of the downfall of the Soviet empire through his courageous support of the cause of freedom across Central and Eastern Europe.

To be sure, it is a record more mixed than partisans on either side are prepared to acknowledge.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Catholic Courier

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