

# Papal anniversary evokes memories

Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, was elected to the Chair of Peter on Oct. 16, 1978. In this issue of the *Catholic Courier*, dated Oct. 16, 2003, I wish Pope John Paul II many blessings as the whole church celebrates this most significant anniversary.

There are few personalities on the world stage in the past quarter-century whose faces have been more familiar, or whose lives and times have been reported more extensively than his. His extensive travels, his outreach to people of all cultures, his ecumenical and interfaith work, his initiatives for peace and his defense of all vulnerable life have left a deep imprint on a world moving from the second to the third millennium.

Now, our Holy Father is in the news not only because of his continuing, vigorous schedule, but also because of his declining health. And the prayers of countless thousands of people will be offered for him in a special way this week — in gratitude for his single-minded pastoral service and in petition for his strength and peace of heart as he copes with illness.

You will have read much about John Paul II in this week of his ju-



**Bishop Matthew H. Clark**  
Along the Way

bilee. I want to add a few personal memories and reflections about him.

1) I was in Rome at the time — in the last year of a seven-year term on the staff of the North American College. We recently had been through the election to the papacy of Albino Luciani, the patriarch of Venice who, to the delight of all, honored his two immediate predecessors by choosing the name John Paul. Little did anyone know that death would end his term 33 days after it had begun. My memories of him are very fond ones. He was direct, clear and familiar in style. I thought of him as an effective catechist. He invited people to think and learn through stories and by sharing his own experience

of faith.

2) The night on which Karol Wojtyla was elected to succeed John Paul was a truly spectacular one. The sunset that day was brilliant, and it gave way to a brilliant full moon. St. Peter's Square was packed with excited people. The façade of the basilica — indeed the whole scene — was illuminated by television lighting. I forget how long I stood in the square waiting for the announcement that evening. But I do remember some of the people with whom I shared the experience — Father Jack Sise, a priest of Albany and a dear friend who was in Rome on sabbatical; Father John Strykowski, a priest of Brooklyn and a colleague at the seminary where I worked; and a young graduate student from the Diocese of Rochester by the name of Father Joseph Hart.

3) There was some confusion among the assembly in St. Peter's Square at the time of the announcement. Some thought that Cardinal Bernard Gantin from Benin in Africa had been elected, since he was the first to step out on the central loggia of St. Peter's. When the name Karol Wojtyla was announced it was clear from the reaction in the

square that many were unfamiliar with the name. But, soon enough, puzzlement changed to astonished excitement when the throng realized that we were greeting the first non-Italian elected to the papacy in more than 400 years.

4) Little did I realize that night that seven months later I would be ordained the eighth bishop of Rochester through the invocation of the Holy Spirit and by the imposition of hands by this newly elected pope. I can hardly believe how quickly the years have gone by or how much has happened in all of our lives in the years since that October evening. I do know that I will be forever grateful for the gift of my ordination and for the kindness and understanding with which Pope John Paul II has treated me through all the years.

5) On the day of his jubilee celebration I will be presiding and preaching at a liturgy at St. Stanislaus Parish in Rochester. With that strong and proud Polish community, I will express your gratitude and my own for the gift John Paul II has been to our church and world, and pray that the grace of God will support him in this illness.

Peace to all.

## CORRECTIONS

Two individuals were incorrectly identified in the caption for a photo on page four of the Oct. 9 edition. They were Deacon Joseph Fitz Glasgow and Father Richard O'Connell. We regret the error.

A name was misspelled in an Oct. 9 article on faith-formation programs at St. Paul of the Cross Parish, Honeoye Falls, and St. Rose Parish, Lima. Ellen Hallahan is one of the two coordinators of the program.

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