



## Long Vigil: Local Catholics follow TV as death approaches

By Paul Garber  
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Catholics in Winston-Salem paid close attention to Pope John Paul II's decline. Maria Gutierrez is shown at Holy Family Catholic Church praying for the pope. (Journal Photo by Bruce Chapman)

Luis Bargas-Tapia began watching coverage of Pope John Paul II's health at his home at 9 a.m. yesterday - and was still watching at midafternoon.

Bargas-Tapia had mixed feelings as he viewed the news on a Spanish-language station at Casa Guadalupe, a Hispanic outreach program of Catholic Social Services. He said that word of the pope's declining health made him sad but he was also comforted by the thought that the pope would finally be freed from sickness.

"Because he's been suffering a lot," Bargas-Tapia said through an interpreter.

The pope's health has been the subject of speculation for many years, but yesterday the concern was much greater among local Catholics as the Vatican continued releasing grim reports about his body slowly shutting down.

Holy Family Catholic Church in Clemmons kept its doors open into the night for people wanting to pray for the pope.

"I feel like he's been a good servant of the Catholic faith for many years. If he passes away, it will be a welcoming to God and Jesus' arms," said Cindy Pickles of Lewisville, one of those praying at Holy Family.

Catholics are likely to disagree on what the pope's legacy will be, said David Yamane, an assistant professor of sociology at Wake Forest University who studies American Catholicism. "I think he's obviously a divisive figure in certain ways, more so in the U.S. than in the rest of the world," he said.

Many U.S. Catholics have disagreed with John Paul's conservative stands, particularly on issues involving questions of sexual ethics, such as contraception, abortion and homosexuality, Yamane said.

Paula Griffin of Clemmons counts herself among U.S. Catholics who agree with the conservative positions. She said she feels "a real sadness for such a great leader to be leaving us. He's the most holy man I've ever known. I think it will be hard for anyone to fill his shoes."

The pope is likely to be remembered for his charisma and personal piety, Yamane said. Media images often showed him in prayer, traveling around the world and drawing huge crowds.

"Those are the sorts of images people are going to carry around for a long time," he said.

Yamane warns that speculation about what the next pope will be like should be treated with some skepticism, because it's nearly impossible to predict what someone will do once he becomes pope.

John Paul's reign is proof of that, according to Yamane. People didn't know what to think of the appointment of John Paul, who was relatively unknown and Polish, not Italian as hundreds of years of his predecessors. Few would have predicted that he would have served for more than 25 years and play a significant role in the fall of Communism in Europe, Yamane said.

Bishop Emeritus William Curlin of the Charlotte Diocese said that he first met John Paul in 1988 and met with him many times, including a number of one-on-one meetings. The diocese has churches in Winston-Salem.

Curlin said that the pope's calm and amiable demeanor impressed him. "When you met with him, he had the ability to make you think you were the only one in the world," Curlin said.

He said that John Paul will leave a legacy of standing up for what he believed in.

"He never tested the wind to see what the popular feeling was," said Curlin, who celebrated a special Mass for the pope last night at St. Patrick Cathedral Church in Charlotte.

Curlin said that the Catholic Church has a legacy of picking the right pope for the times, and people should feel confident that the next pope will continue that trend.

"God will raise up another man to fill the needs of the church," he said.

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