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POPE JOHN PAUL II | Millions throughout the world pray for 84-year-old pontiff.

Vatican: Pope on verge of death

Thousands keep vigil in Vatican City while awaiting news

By VICTOR L. SIMPSON
Associated Press

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II was near death as dawn approached Saturday, his breathing shallow and his heart and kidneys failing, the Vatican said. Millions of faithful around the world paid homage, many weeping as they knelt with bowed heads, others carrying candles in prayer for the 84-year-old pontiff.

The pope "is on the verge of death," Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragan, head of the Vatican's health care office, told the Mexican television network Televisa. "I talked to the doctors, and they told me there is no more hope."

Addressing the crowd at St. Peter's Square, where as many as 70,000 people prayed and stood vigil in the chilly night, Angelo Comastri, the pope's vicar general for Vatican City, said "This evening or this night, Christ opens the door to the pope,"

At times the huge gathering fell so silent the sound of the square's trickling fountains was audible. At other points, the crowd sang, "Stay with us!" But as dawn approached, the numbers in the sprawling plaza diminished. Many of those who stayed wrapped themselves in blankets and gazed tearfully at John Paul's third-floor windows, where the lights remained in the pope's studio and his secretary's room. The papal bedroom was not lit.

In a sign of the pope's decline, several cardinals said they were heading to Rome, including Roger Mahony, archbishop of Los Angeles, and William Keeler, archbishop of Baltimore, Maryland. After the official mourning period following the death of a pope, cardinals hold a secret vote in the Sistine Chapel to choose a successor.

Around the world, priests readied Roman Catholics for John Paul's passing. Many expressed hope that his final hours would be peaceful.

"Now he prepares to meet the Lord," Cardinal Francis George said at a Mass in Chicago. "As the portals of death open for him, as they will for each of us ... we must accompany him with our own prayers."

Newspapers in Italy devoted most of their Sat-

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People gather to read prayers as thousands of the faithful crowded into St. Peter's Square in Rome, awaiting updates on the condition of ailing Pope John Paul II.

Pope's battle testifies to his belief in the sanctity of life

By JENNIFER A. BOWEN
News-Democrat

Pope John Paul II has fought a very public battle with failing health.

His suffering sends a powerful message that underscores that which he sought to deliver during his tenure as head of the Catholic church: Life is sacred, no matter how painful.

"The Catholic faith believes that life is a precious gift from God, and we have stewardship over the life that God has given us," said Dr. William Casperson, medical director at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Belleville and director of the hospital's ethics committee. "He has really fought a noble battle with his Parkinson's Disease, and he has fought hard to stay alive. His health has failed so badly and it's obvious to him that he is losing the battle. With a lot of grace, he has pulled back and said it's time to go."

As his health began failing quickly and significantly on Friday, the pope refused additional medical care, choosing instead to remain in his apartment at the Vatican for the end of his life.

The ethical and religious directives followed by Catholic health services, including St. Elizabeth's Hospital, indicate that while people have the duty to preserve life, that duty is not absolute.

"It's OK to reject life-prolonging procedures that are insufficiently beneficial or excessively burdensome," Casperson said. "He is basically living his life and handling his end-of-life issues exactly as he should."

After he was shot more than 20 years ago in front of St. Peter's Basilica, the pope responded by writing a message he has continued to deliver: "Human suffering evokes compassion, it also evokes respect and in its own way, intimidates." He wrote that message in 1984.

Catholic followers have compared the pope's public suffering with the suffering of Jesus,

Please see LIFE, A2

Pope in St. Louis

Pope John Paul II left lots of memories with metro-east Catholics when he visited St. Louis in 1999.
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John Paul's legacy

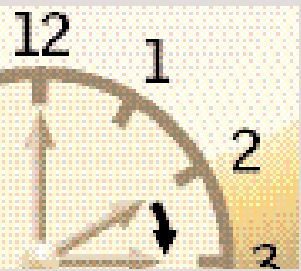
The pontiff's charisma won over people throughout the world, even if they didn't always agree with him.
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Papal encounters

Several metro-east residents have had the chance to meet the pope, and they share their memories.
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Web extra

Read the stories about Pope John Paul II's visit to St. Louis in January 1999 and the text of his www.bellevillenews-democrat.com.



Daylight saving time begins Sunday

Don't forget to move your clocks up one hour before you go to bed tonight. Daylight saving time begins at 2 a.m. Sunday.

Governor proposes more gambling to fund education

Casinos would get more gaming spots

By RAMONA CURTIS
News-Democrat

Gov. Rod Blagojevich has proposed a plan that would boost gambling in order to generate additional revenue for public education.

Under the proposal, which was released Thursday, \$300 million in additional funds would result from increased numbers of gaming positions at

existing riverboats.

Illinois law currently limits each casino to 1,200 gaming positions. The metro-east has two riverboat casinos: The Alton Belle and the Casino Queen in East St. Louis.

Blagojevich previously has stated that he does not support expansion of casino gambling in Illinois.

But the governor was quick to point out that his plan does



Blagojevich

not include adding any more casinos, only the number of gaming spots the current casinos can have.

To generate the additional money, the nine casinos operating in Illinois would split an additional 24,000 new gaming positions. State law allows a 10th floating casino to operate in the Chica-

go suburbs, but the license for it has been mired in a series of lawsuits. Its original holder, Emerald Casinos, was blocked from running a casino because of ties to organized crime.

While school officials say that increased funds are a step in the right direction, superintendents are cautious about the proposal.

"I've been around for a number of years. I know when the lottery was passed everyone said that money was going to

help to fund education," Alton District 11 Superintendent Jim Baiter said. "The plan was to put money in the general fund, but the money from the general fund was paid out to other things, so we didn't see an increase from the lottery."

However, under the governor's proposal, the funds generated from increased gambling would be used directly for edu-

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LOTTERY FOR ILLINOIS

Pick 3-Midday: 2-6-3 Pick 4-Evening: 0-6-3-4
Pick 3-Evening: 3-2-6 Little Lotto: 03-07-14-16-35
Pick 4-Midday: 2-5-6-7 Jackpot: \$30.5 million

FOR MISSOURI

Pick 3-Midday: 5-3-1 ; Evening: 5-1-4
Pick 4-Midday: 0-2-9-2 ; Evening: 8-7-0-6
Show Me 5-Midday: 4-9-11-24-25
Show Me 5-Evening: 11-14-30-38-40

MEGA MILLIONS Game 11-19-28-32-45 Mega Ball: 10 Jackpot: \$75 million

