

# ENCOUNTERS WITH THE PONTIFF

## Meeting pope stunned armless man, his wife

BY PATRICK J. POWERS  
News-Democrat

It was the piercing eyes that John Foppe remembered most about his visit with Pope John Paul II.

"It was like he could look right into your soul," said Foppe, a Breese native born without arms who works as motivational speaker to discuss life's challenges. "It was just a very moving experience."

Foppe and his then-new bride, Christine Fulbright, traveled to Rome in June 2003, shortly after their wedding. They'd already obtained tickets to the pope's weekly audience, but had no idea they'd soon be standing face-to-face with Pope John Paul II.

"We didn't know anything about it," Foppe said.

Nor did the couple know they'd be asked to arrive in their wedding attire, a stipulation of the special honeymoon tickets they received. It was officials from the Vatican who sent Foppe and Fulbright scrambling through the streets of Rome looking to piece together a wedding dress.

Fortunately, Fulbright brought a white dress on the trip to Europe. Coupled with a white shawl purchased in Rome, Foppe and Fulbright manufactured a new dress. It was off to St. Peter's Square

with ticket in hand.

The couple procured the tickets through former Belleville Bishop Wilton Gregory. What they knew was that they'd at least be one of about 12,000 to attend the pope's weekly audience. What they didn't know was that they'd be standing in the front row.

"We just thought we'd be part of the crowd," Foppe said. "We kept getting ushered forward ... and forward ... and forward."

Eventually, Foppe and Fulbright found themselves face to face with Pope John Paul II.

He asked whether they were Americans, to which Foppe responded "yes." Foppe said they were friends of Wilton Gregory, the pope acknowledged with a nod. Fulbright presented the pope with Foppe's book, "What's Your Excuse? Making the Most of What You Have."

The book encapsulates Foppe's struggles from growing up without arms. Foppe uses his feet to hold coffee cups, razors, ink pens, skillets and other objects.

The brief, but powerful, moment with Pope John Paul II is something he'll remember for the rest of his life, Foppe said. "It was incredible," he said.

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John Foppe and his new bride, Christine Fulbright, met Pope John Paul II on their visit to Rome in June 2003, shortly after they were married.

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## Braxton gives words of solace

BY BRETT DOWNER  
American Press (Lake Charles, La.)

Belleville Bishop-designate Edward Braxton — still serving as the leader of the Catholic diocese in Lake Charles, La. — celebrated the noon Mass on Friday at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Lake Charles.

Here's what Braxton said about Pope John Paul II:

"He has had a long, rich and extraordinary life. Let us pray for him, that he will find peace and serenity. He has been the visual symbol of our faith for the past 27 years as pope, serving with energy and vigor.

"We ask God to look down on him with love. As pope, he has been a true successor of Peter, helping to build the church and spread the faith among all people of the world. We ask that God will be with him during his final hours, and grant him peace and comfort, and that he will strengthen all of us who follow him.

"For many Catholics, John Paul II is the only pope they have even known. He has been a pilgrim, traveling to all parts of the world, bringing the word of God to everyone."



Braxton

## Belleville priest recalls meeting John Paul II

BY PATRICK J. POWERS  
News-Democrat

The newly ordained Rev. John Myler was hours away from leaving Rome in 1983 when he received an unexpected phone call from Vatican City.

"The Holy Father would like to know if you could come to Mass with him tomorrow?" the voice on the other end of the phone asked. It was Archbishop Stanislaw Dziwisz, then serving as secretary to Pope John Paul II.

Myler accepted the invitation without hesitation, although it caught him a little off guard. He was 29 years old at the time, ordained only months earlier and on his first pilgrimage to Rome as a priest. "I didn't expect it," Myler said.

The Mass took place in Pope John Paul II's private chapel in the Vatican. It was an event Myler, now the pastor of St. Mary Church in Belleville, fondly remembers.



The Rev. John Myler, left, meets Pope John Paul II in the papal office during the 2004 Easter season at the Vatican.

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"I will always remember the great intent with which the pope offered Mass, the deep level of his prayer, and his attention to the sacred mysteries," Myler said. "You just knew you were in the presence of a man who com-

pletely depended on Jesus Christ."

Myler has traveled to Rome every year since his ordination and said he's met the pope on 12 to 15 separate occasions. He met Pope John Paul II twice in one day on

one of those trips in 1994 — the first at morning Mass and the second during a public audience with about 5,000 other people.

"He reached out to me and said, 'I see you two times today,'" Myler said about the 1994 visit. "I thought, 'No, I'm seeing you two times today.'"

The latest visit was last year during Myler's sabbatical at the Pontifical North American College at the Vatican. Myler participated in the pope's Ash Wednesday service, distributing ashes to churchgoers from around the world.

Myler said he's met with the pope privately a handful of times during his regular visits.

"He was always very interested in the church in the United States," Myler said. "He was just a great inspiration for a young priest."

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## Shrine director recalls rare Mass with pope

BY PATRICK J. POWERS  
News-Democrat

The Rev. Lou Studer only celebrated Mass once with Pope John Paul II, but it's an experience he'll not soon forget.

Studer was one of the hundreds of priests who celebrated Mass with the pontiff for more than 100,000 Catholics at the Edward Jones Dome, then-called the Trans World Dome, when John Paul II visited St. Louis in January 1999.

"Celebrating Mass with him was something very, very special," said Studer, director of the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows near Belleville. "And perhaps more special than meeting him personally."

The day started for Studer at 3:30 a.m.

Media reports suggested downtown St. Louis would be a mess trafficwise, so Studer decided he'd rather be early than late for Mass with the Holy Father. "I remember waiting a long, long



Studer

time for the Mass to get started," he said. Studer donned his vestments with hundreds of other priests and joined a procession onto the floor of the Dome, where thousands of local Catholics waited. Pope John Paul II arrived, celebrated Mass and left. But the day was far from over for Studer.

Studer lunched with his friends and rehearsed the day's events for hours. He didn't return to the Shrine until late that evening. He didn't get to his room until 10:30 p.m., making for a long day. But it didn't matter.

"I couldn't sleep for the longest time," Studer said. "I was so wound up. It was a wonderful experience."

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## Networks scramble to cover ill pope; Fox blows coverage

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Fox News Channel erroneously reported the death of Pope John Paul II on Friday afternoon, backpedaled several minutes later, then apologized to viewers for the mistake.

Television networks were marshaling resources and dealing with conflicting reports as the pope's illness took a turn for the worse Friday, maintaining an electronic vigil like the Roman Catholic faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square.

Viewers could be forgiven for confusion as the cable news networks flashed reports at them. At 12:30 p.m. EST, MSNBC posted the words "Pope lost consciousness" on its screen. At the same moment, CNN was reporting: "Pope visibly joining in prayers of those around him."

But at 1:23 p.m., Fox News Channel anchor Shepard Smith reported that the pope had died. At least initially, he did not cite sources.

By 1:30 p.m., Fox reporter Greg Palkot in Rome was sending signals of caution, saying the report had not been confirmed and the network was checking into it.

Smith explained to viewers that a Fox sister company in Italy had been listening to an inaccurate report and it was transmitted to Fox.

Fox spokesman Irena Briganti said a Fox producer, monitoring a translation of reports from Italian media, erroneously shouted that the pope had died and it had gotten on the air through an open mike. Smith was responding to the producer's words.

About 1:55 p.m., Smith apologized to Fox viewers for the initial unsubstantiated report.



A woman lights a candle as people pray in a church in Wadowice, Poland, John Paul II's native town.

AP

"There will be another pope, but it won't be the same. He has a spark that makes him very special."

Jesus Valencia

Mexican man who attributed his recovery from a childhood infection to a bedside visit from Pope John Paul II in 1979

## Millions of faithful offer prayers for recovery, eternal rest of pope

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — Crawling on their knees and bowing their heads, millions of faithful around the world appealed Friday for the recovery — or the eternal rest — of a man who transcended the Roman Catholic Church's highest office.

At shrines, churches and cathedrals, special Masses celebrated Pope John Paul II both for his youthful vigor that transformed the church and for his recent courage in confronting death. Protestants, Muslims, Jews and even atheists praised a man whose work for peace and unity made few religious distinctions.

"There will be another pope, but it won't be the same," said a tearful Jesus Valencia, 29, who attributed his recovery from a childhood infection to a bedside visit from John Paul in 1979. "He has a spark that makes him very special."

Valencia was among hundreds of faithful who advanced on their knees into the Basilica of Guadalupe, where the pope canonized the first Indian saint, Juan Diego, in 2002. Many wept and grimaced in pain as they inched forward on the cobblestones, clutching votive candles bearing John Paul's image.

Other scenes of devotion came in a tiny cloister on the Lofoten Islands off northeastern Norway, where the three monks were intent in prayer. In Lima, Peru, where a marching band offered solemn music as hundreds filed into a special Mass. In Poznan, Poland, where officials halted a soccer game before half-

time after the crowd, hearing news of the pope's rapid decline, chanted: "Stop the match!"

"He is a person who didn't see color or race," Elvia Medina, 57, said at a church in Houston. "For him, we were all equal."

The first non-Italian pope in centuries, John Paul had a manner that made people around the world think of him as their own. Mexicans chanted during his five visits: "Juan Pablo, brother, you are already Mexican!" Brazilians reacted with delight when John Paul declared himself "carioca," a term for people from Rio de Janeiro. Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Washington said Friday that "in a certain sense, he was American."

In Wadowice, Poland — Karol Wojtyla's true hometown — people abandoned school and work to pray when the pope's condition turned critical. Wadowice is "on its knees," the Rev. Jakub Gil told parishioners.

"He gave people hope, strength and faith in freedom. Every Pole is proud of him," said ship mechanic Janusz Kaniewski, 42, who cut off a ski vacation to pray for the pope.

Even non-Catholics embraced John Paul, crediting him for ending wars, spreading democracy and combating religious animosity.

"This is a person who dedicated his life to teaching all of us that we have a fundamental obligation to respect one another just because we are the children of God," said Michael Schudrich, an American who serves as Poland's chief rabbi.