

POPE BENEDICT: Eight Years as Pope Capped Long Ministry as Teacher of Faith

BY CINDY WOODEN



VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Retired Pope Benedict XVI, who had an impressive record as a teacher and defender of the basics of Catholic faith, is likely to go down in history books as the first pope in almost 600 years to resign.

He died on Dec. 31 at the age of 95, nearly 10 years after leaving the papacy to retire to what he said would be a life of prayer and study.

Pope Francis was scheduled to celebrate his predecessor's funeral on Jan. 5 in St. Peter's Square. Matteo Bruni, Director of the Vatican Press Office, said the funeral rites would be simple in keeping with the wishes of the late pope.

As the retired pope neared death, he was given the anointing of the sick on Dec. 28 in his residence, Bruni said.

His body was to lie in St. Peter's Basilica beginning on Jan. 2 so that people could pay their respects and offer their prayers, he said.

Immediately after the pope died at 9:34 a.m., Bruni said, his personal secretary, Archbishop Georg Ganswein, phoned Pope Francis, who went immediately to the late pope's bedside to pray and to offer condolences to those who had cared for him in the last years of his life.

Archbishop Ganswein told Vatican News on Jan. 1 that Pope Benedict's last words were, "Lord, I love you."

It was about 3 a.m. the day he died, the archbishop said. "In a faint voice, but in a clearly discernible way, he said in Italian, 'Lord, I love you!' I was not there at the time, but the nurse told me shortly afterward. These were his last comprehensible words, because afterward he was no longer able to express himself."

A close collaborator of St. John Paul II and the theological expert behind many of his major teachings and gestures, Pope Benedict came to the papacy after 24 years heading the doctrinal congregation's work of safeguarding Catholic teaching on faith and morals, correcting the work of some Catholic theologians, and ensuring the theological solidity of the documents issued by other Vatican offices.

As pope, he continued writing as a theologian, but also made historically important gestures to Catholics who had difficulty accepting all of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, particularly about the liturgy. In 2007, he widened permission to use the "extraordinary" or pre-Vatican II form of the Mass and, a short time later, extended a hand to the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X. Besides lifting the excommunications of four of the society's bishops who were ordained illicitly in 1988, he launched a long and intense dialogue with the group. In the end, though, the talks broke down.

His papacy, which began when he was 78, was extremely busy for a man who already had a pacemaker and who had wanted to retire to study, write, and pray when he turned 75. He used virtually every medium at his disposal — books and Twitter, sermons and encyclicals — to catechize the faithful on the foundational beliefs and practices of Christianity, ranging from the sermons of St. Augustine to the sign of the cross.

Pope Benedict was the first pope to meet with victims of clerical sexual abuse. He clarified church laws to expedite cases and mandated that bishops' conferences put in place stringent norms against abuse.

Although he did not expect to travel much, he ended up making 24 trips to six continents and three times presided over World Youth Day mega-gatherings: in Germany in 2005, Australia in 2008, and Spain in 2011.

On a historic visit to the United States in 2008, the pope brought his own identity into clearer focus for

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Americans. He set forth a moral challenge on issues ranging from economic justice to abortion. He also took church recognition of the priestly sex-abuse scandal to a new level, expressing his personal shame at what happened and personally praying with victims.

While still in his 30s, he served as an influential adviser during the Second Vatican Council, 1962-65, and as pope, he made it a priority to correct what he saw as overly expansive interpretations of Vatican II in favor of readings that stressed the council's continuity with the church's millennial traditions.

Under his oversight, the Vatican continued to highlight the church's moral boundaries on issues such as end-of-life medical care, marriage, and homosexuality. But the pope's message to society at large focused less on single issues and more on the risk of losing the basic relationship between the human being and the Creator.

Surprising those who had expected a by-the-book pontificate from a man who had spent so many years as the Vatican's chief doctrinal official, Pope Benedict emphasized that Christianity was a religion of love and not a religion of rules.

The German-born pontiff did not try to match the popularity of St. John Paul, but the millions of people who came to see him in Rome and abroad came to appreciate his smile, his frequent ad-libs, and his ability to speak from the heart.

Some of Pope Benedict's most memorable statements came when he applied simple Gospel values to social issues such as the protection of human life, the environment, and economics. When the global financial crisis worsened in 2008, for example, the pope insisted that financial institutions must put people before profits. He also reminded people that money and worldly success are passing realities, saying: "Whoever builds his life on these things — on material things, on success, on appearances — is building on sand."

He consistently warned the West that unless its secularized society rediscovered religious values, it could not hope to engage in real dialogue with Muslims and members of other religious traditions.

In his encyclicals and in his books on "Jesus of Nazareth," the pope honed that message, asking readers to discover the essential connections between sacrificial love, works of charity, a dedication to the truth, and the Gospel of Christ.

The retired pope looked in-depth at his papacy and resignation, his relationships with St. John Paul and Pope Francis,



Newly elected Pope John Paul II greets Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of Munich and Freising in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on Oct. 22, 1978.

and a host of other issues in "Last Testament," a book-length interview with journalist Peter Seewald published in 2016.

In the book, Pope Benedict insisted once again that he was not pressured by anyone or any event to resign and he did not feel he was running away from any problem. However, he acknowledged "practical governance was not my forte, and this certainly was a weakness."

Insisting "my hour had passed, and I had given all I could," Pope Benedict said he never regretted resigning, but he did regret hurting friends and faithful who were "really distressed and felt forsaken" by his stepping down.

Less than a month after resigning, he already looked fraiser and walked with noticeably more difficulty than he did when he left office. The video images released by the Vatican on March 23, 2013, when his successor, Pope Francis, visited him at Castel Gandolfo underscored the "diminishing energy" Pope Benedict had said led to his resignation.

Pope Benedict moved to the papal summer villa at Castel Gandolfo on Feb. 28, 2013, the day his resignation took effect. He remained at the villa south of Rome for two months — a period that included the conclave that elected Pope Francis as his successor and the first month of the new pope's pontificate. The retired pope moved back to the Vatican on May 2,

2013, living in a monastery remodeled as a residence for him, his secretary, and the consecrated women who cared for his household before and after his resignation.

On his only post-retirement trip outside of Italy, he flew to Germany in June of 2020 for a five-day visit with his ailing 96-year-old brother.

Answering questions from reporters on a flight back from Brazil in July of 2013, Pope

Francis spoke with admiration of the retired pope's humility, intelligence, and prayerfulness. The unusual situation of having a pope and a retired pope both living at the Vatican was working out very well, Pope Francis said. Having the retired pope nearby to consult with, or ask questions of, Pope Francis said, was "like having a grandfather at home — a very wise grandfather."

By the time Pope Benedict had been retired for a year, his daily routine was set. Archbishop Georg Ganswein, his personal secretary, said his days began with Mass, morning prayer, and breakfast. Although mostly hidden from public view, he was not cloistered, but continued welcoming old friends and colleagues, engaging in dialogue or offering spiritual counsel. He spent hours reading and dealing with correspondence before a 4 p.m. stroll in the garden and recitation of the rosary.

In the early days of his retirement, to the delight and surprise of pilgrims and cardinals, Pope Benedict appeared at major events with Pope Francis, including the opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica on Dec. 8, 2015.

At a June 2016 celebration in the Apostolic Palace, where Pope Benedict once lived and worked, Pope Francis, top officials of the Roman Curia, and a few friends gathered with him to mark the 65th anniversary of the retired pontiff's priestly ordination.

Pope Francis told Pope Benedict that with him in residence, the monastery in the Vatican Gardens "emanates tranquility, peace, strength, faithfulness, maturity, faith, dedication, and loyalty, which does so much good for me and gives strength to me and to the

whole church."

Pope Benedict replied to Pope Francis, "More than the beauty found in the Vatican Gardens, your goodness is the place where I live; I feel protected."

He prayed that Pope Francis would continue to "lead us all on this path of divine mercy that shows the path of Jesus, to Jesus, and to God."

Mercy was a prominent topic in an interview Pope Benedict gave in 2015. The Catholic focus on mercy really began with St. John Paul, the retired pope told Belgian Jesuit Father Jacques Servais in the written interview, which was not released until March of 2016.

From his experience as a youth during World War II and his ministry under communism in Poland, St. John Paul "affirmed that mercy is the only true and ultimately effective reaction against the power of evil. Only where there is mercy does cruelty end, only there do evil and violence stop," said Pope Benedict, who worked closely with the Polish pope for decades.

"Pope Francis," he said, "is in complete agreement with this line. His pastoral practice is expressed precisely in the fact that he speaks continuously of God's mercy."

Pope Benedict had said he planned to live a "hidden life" in retirement — and to a large extent he did. But when he did make contributions to public discussions, they became headline news. In April of 2019, for instance, what he described as "notes" on the clerical sexual abuse crisis were published; and, in January of 2020, an essay he wrote on priestly celibacy was published in a book by Cardinal Robert Sarah, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the



Pope Benedict XVI appears on the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica after his election on April 19, 2005. Pope Benedict died Dec. 31, 2022, at the age of 95 in his residence at the Vatican.

CNS photo/Nancy Wiechec



A man holds a copy of the Vatican's *L'Osservatore Romano* newspaper announcing the death of Pope Benedict XVI, in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on Dec. 31, 2022.

Sacraments.

In the text on abuse, which the retired pope said was motivated by the February 2019 Vatican summit on the crisis, Pope Benedict traced the abuse crisis to a loss of certainty about faith and morals, especially beginning in the late 1960s. To address the crisis, he wrote, "what is required first and foremost is the renewal of the faith in the reality of Jesus Christ given to us in the Blessed Sacrament."

The 2020 text on celibacy became the center of a media storm, not only because of its content, but also because Catholics were awaiting Pope Francis' official response to the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon and suggestions made there that in remote areas the church could consider ordaining some married men to take the sacraments to Catholics who usually go months without.

Since marriage and priesthood both demand the total devotion and self-giving of a man to his vocation, "it does not seem possible to realize both vocations simultaneously," Pope Benedict wrote in his essay.

The retired pope's contribution to the discussion became even more controversial when Archbishop Ganswein informed media and the original publisher that while Pope Benedict contributed an essay to Cardinal Sarah's book, he did not want to be listed as co-author of the volume.

As inevitable as his election seemed after St. John Paul died in 2005, Pope Benedict's path to the papacy was long and indirect.

Joseph Ratzinger was born on April 16, 1927, in the Bavarian town of Marktl am Inn, the third and youngest child of a police officer, Joseph

Sr., and his wife, Maria. Young Joseph joined his brother, Georg, at a minor seminary in 1939.

Like other young students in Germany at the time, he was automatically enrolled in the Hitler Youth program, but soon stopped going to meetings. During World War II, he was conscripted into the army, and in the spring of 1945, he deserted his unit and returned home, spending a few months in an Allied prisoner-of-war camp. He returned to the seminary late in 1945 and was ordained six years later, along with his brother.

In a meeting with young people in 2006, the pope said witnessing the brutality of the Nazi regime helped persuade him to become a priest. But he also had to overcome some doubts, he said. For one thing, he asked himself whether he "could faithfully live celibacy" his entire life. He also recognized that his real leanings were toward theology and wondered whether he had the qualities of a good pastor and the ability "to be simple with the simple people."

After a short stint as a parish priest, the future pope began a teaching career and built a reputation as one of the church's foremost theologians. At Vatican II, he made important contributions as a theological expert and embraced the council's early work. But he began to have misgivings about an emerging anti-Roman bias, the idea of a "church from below" run on a parliamentary model, and the direction of theological research in the church — criticism that would become even sharper in later years.

In a 2005 speech that served as a kind of manifesto for his young papacy, Pope Benedict rejected what he called a "her-

meneutic of discontinuity and rupture" in interpreting Vatican II as a radical break with the past. The pope called instead for reading the council through a "hermeneutic of reform" in continuity with Catholic tradition.

In 1977, St. Paul VI named him Archbishop of Munich and

Freising and, four years later, Pope John Paul called him to head the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, where he wielded great influence on issues such as liberation theology, dissent from church teachings, and pressure for women's ordination. Serving in this role for nearly a quarter century, then-Cardinal Ratzinger earned a reputation in some quarters as a sort of grand inquisitor, seeking to stamp out independent thinking, an image belied by his passion for debate with thinkers inside and outside the church.

As the newly elected pope in 2005, he explained that he took the name Benedict to evoke the memory of Pope Benedict XV, a "courageous prophet of peace" during World War I, and said he wanted to place his ministry at the service of reconciliation and harmony among peoples.

Like his namesake and his predecessors, he was untiring in his appeals for an end to violence in world trouble spots and for dialogue as the only true and lasting solution to conflict. Another key to building a better world, he said repeatedly, is to respect the right of each person to seek and to worship God.

A direct appeal to China's communist government to respect the religious freedom of its people was a central part

of Pope Benedict's 2007 Letter to Chinese Catholics. The letter also pleaded with the faithful on the mainland to work toward reconciliation between communities that had accepted some government control in order to minister openly and those that continued to practice their faith more clandestinely.

In the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States and amid reports of rising religious-inspired violence in various parts of the world, Pope Benedict also repeatedly and clearly condemned all violence committed in the name of God.

One of the biggest tests of his papacy came after a lecture at Germany's University of Regensburg, in 2006, when he quoted a Christian medieval emperor who said the prophet Muhammad had brought "things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."

Protests in the Muslim world followed, and Pope Benedict apologized that his words had offended Muslims, distancing himself from the text he had quoted. Soon after, he accepted the invitation of an international group of Muslim scholars and leaders to launch a new dialogue initiative, "The Common Word," looking at teachings that Christians and Muslims share.



Pope Benedict XVI and his brother, Msgr. Georg Ratzinger, take a walk through the garden of a house the pope owns in Pentling, near Regensburg, Germany, on Sept. 13, 2006.

CNS photo/Michaela Rehle, Reuters

The global Impact of a German Pope

BY PAULINA GUZIK

(OSV News) — Very few figures within the contemporary Church have influenced it as deeply and for as long as Pope Benedict XVI, who died on Dec. 31 at the age of 95. The lasting legacy of Joseph Ratzinger — whom author George Weigel told OSV News was “one of the most consequential Christian figures of modern times” — will be a part of the universal Church for generations to come. Here is an analysis of six pivotal points of the global legacy of the late pope emeritus.

Vatican Council Influencer

Joseph Ratzinger will go down in history linked to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), of which he was first one of its protagonists in the shadows and later one of its most consequential interpreters.

When the council opened in 1962, Father Ratzinger, only 35 years old, was one of the stars of the new German theology. Cardinal Joseph Frings, then head of the German bishops' conference, took Ratzinger to the council as an expert, and in that position, he played a fundamental role in the development of the conciliar documents on the Church, revelation, and sacred Scripture.

“The council’s purpose was to give a new, fresh, compelling articulation to the ancient truths of the Catholic faith,” Weigel told OSV News. “And during the four years of Vatican II, Joseph Ratzinger was one of the three most influential theologians helping to shape both the bishops’ reflections on these ancient truths and in formulating that fresh presentation of those truths.”

After five years as archbishop of Munich, then-Cardinal Ratzinger was called to Rome by Pope John Paul II, with whom he had crossed paths at the council — when John Paul was still known as Karol Wojtyla. As the Polish pope set forth to implement Vatican II, Ratzinger became his closest collaborator on those same subjects on which he had previously influenced the council as an expert.

The council opened new paths for the Church, especially in three areas: the relationship of faith with science; the relationship of the Church with the liberal state; and finally, the links of the Catholic Church with

other religions. On these three issues, the differences between the teachings of the previous councils and that of Vatican II were so striking that it seemed to many that the Church had taken a leap into the void.

Faced with interpretations from all sides that Vatican II was a “rupture” with tradition, Ratzinger, first as a theologian, then as John Paul II’s adviser, and finally as Pope Benedict XVI, defended an interpretation of continuity. He explained this a few months after he was elected pope, in a speech delivered on Dec. 22, 2005.

The truths taught by Vatican II, he argued, were already present in the doctrine transmitted by the Church. Vatican II only took care to make them explicit, thus maintaining a continuous evolution of Catholic doctrine. In keeping with the council, Ratzinger wanted Christ to be at the center.

“Ratzinger at Vatican II was convinced that the Church’s address to the world, the Church’s proposal to the world, had to be less ecclesiocentric and more Christocentric,” said Weigel, Pope John Paul II’s biographer and author of “God’s Choice: Pope Benedict XVI and the Future of the Catholic Church.”

“The Church had to offer a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, not simply a meeting with the institution of the Church,” Weigel said. “I think this will be something the Church continues to learn from in the decades and centuries ahead.”

The Ratzinger Way of Handling the Abuse Crisis

Pope Benedict XVI also leaves behind a lasting legacy in the reforms made necessary by the clergy sexual abuse scandal that has plagued the Church in recent decades.

Ratzinger’s life was changed forever when John Paul II asked him to lead the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) in 1981. As Greg Erlandson and Matthew Bunson describe in their book “Pope Benedict XVI and the Sexual Abuse Crisis: Working for Reform and Renewal” (OSV, 2010), Cardinal Ratzinger dedicated Fridays to working on cases regarding abusive priests — a task that became his personal Way of the Cross. He knew, well before anyone else in the Vatican, what kind of wounds

sexual abuse leaves and the lasting impact it has on the lives of the victims.

“He was quite fierce in his determination to get at these problems,” Weigel told OSV News.

When it was clear the bishops were not handling the cases well in their dioceses, the remedy came directly from the CDF in the form of the motu proprio “Sacramentorum Sanctorum Tutela,” published in 2001. Signed by John Paul II, the document officially asked, among other things, that all cases involving the abuse of minors be sent to Ratzinger’s desk.

“Cardinal Ratzinger moved the responsibility for dealing with it into his own hands. And then while he was pope, he continued to cleanse the Church of this ‘filth,’” Weigel said. “So, I think he gets full marks for the way he handled this abuse crisis as prefect of CDF and as pope.”

In 2010, Benedict XVI further tightened Church legislation regarding abuse by updating John Paul II’s “Norms Concerning the Most Serious Crimes.” The pontiff expressly indicated that the Church should hear and treat victims with respect, fully cooperate with civil authorities, and work quickly to expedite such cases according to canon law.

That same year, the pope sent a letter to Catholics in Ireland to help them prepare guidelines for the treatment of cases of sexual abuse of children by clerics, which proved itself a historic moment.

As Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi affirmed in a Holy See Press Office news release from 2016, this pastoral letter is “the necessary reference document for the conversion and renewal of the ecclesial community from the dramatic experience of abuse.”

The pope also cared greatly for the victim-survivors of clergy abuse, taking time to officially meet with survivors in April of 2008 during his pastoral visit to the United States — the first pope ever to do so. From then on, when Benedict XVI traveled to a particularly affected country, be it the U.S., Australia, Malta, the United Kingdom, or Germany, he made a point of meeting with victims to ask for forgiveness, in private and in public, in the name of the Church and to console them.

While in Australia for World Youth Day in 2008, Pope Benedict XVI celebrated Mass for the victims of clerical abuse. “That was a beautiful Mass,” Australian Cardinal George Pell told OSV News.

“He greeted each one of them. And I know that the victims who were there were deeply moved and deeply grateful. He was a man of genuine compassion.”

In 2013, following Benedict’s resignation, Pope Francis continued on the path begun by the German pope, with new documents and measures that affirmed Benedict’s decisions. When a January 2022 German report on the Archdiocese of Munich stated that, when he was archbishop, Joseph Ratzinger allegedly failed to act over four cases, the Vatican released a letter in which the former pontiff asked forgiveness for any “grievous fault.”

The Catechism: A Gift to All Catholics

Pope Benedict XVI’s contribution, first as a cardinal and later as pope, to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, widely is viewed as one of the most important magisterial acts since the 1962-1965 Second Vatican Council. Arranged in four main parts, the catechism sought to clarify and re-propose the Church’s doctrine in accord with the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.

As CDF prefect, Cardinal Ratzinger chaired the drafting commission, which spent six years compiling the catechism at Pope John Paul II’s request. He later described its publication in October of 1992, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the opening of Vatican II, as “a miracle.”

As pontiff, Benedict XVI went on to approve a new Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church in June of 2005 (published in English a year later), which condensed the catechism’s contents in a more concise and accessible form around key questions. It was followed by a youth edition, known as YouCat, in 2011.

The aim, Benedict explained at the time, was to provide a deeper understanding of the church and a “new impulse for evangelization.” He desired an “authoritative, reliable, and complete text on the essential aspects of the Church’s faith,” which also contained “only the essential, fundamental elements of Catholic faith and morals, simply expressed.”

“The Catechism itself should be seen as the final act of Vatican II reforms,” Father Roberto Regoli, Professor of Church History at Rome’s Pontifical Gregorian University, told OSV News. “And the role of Benedict XVI was central to this, in coordinating and defin-

ing the Catholic Church’s faith and pastoral doctrine for new times.”

Benedict XVI and a ‘Church for All’

In an effort to revitalize the Catholic Church, particularly in Europe, Pope Benedict XVI issued guidelines in July of 2007 allowing a wider use of the 1962 Roman Missal. His apostolic letter “Summorum Pontificum” was widely seen as a bid to heal wounds with traditionalist Catholics who often weren’t allowed to practice this form of worship in their local Churches. As a result, some turned to the Priestly Society of St. Pius X, a traditionalist religious order in irregular communion with Rome after its founder, the late French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, ordained four of his priests as bishops without permission resulting in his excommunication.

The pope said his initiative drew from earlier work by John Paul II, who had allowed diocesan bishops the ability to permit the celebration of the older form of the Latin Mass, and which was intended as a gesture to those “attached with such love and affection to earlier liturgical forms which deeply shaped their culture and spirit.”

The motu proprio, however, was opposed by some Catholics who described it as a rollback of Vatican II reforms.

In November of 2009, Benedict also made pastoral provisions for Anglicans who had requested to join the Catholic Church but who desired to keep their Anglican heritage. His apostolic constitution, “Anglicanorum Coetibus,” offended some Anglican leaders. However, it also came at a time when many Anglicans, including those requesting full communion with the Catholic Church, saw Anglicanism permit unilateral ordination of women and increasingly adopt positions at odds with traditional Christian morality, making ecumenical relations more difficult.

Today, the Catholic Church has three ordinariates for these Catholics of the Anglican tradition — one for the United Kingdom, one for North America, and a third for Australia and Pacific Rim countries.

Benedict XVI also had a special affection for African Catholics. In the fast-growing African Church, which had tripled in recent decades to around 146 million members, Benedict took steps to address



CNS photo/Paul Haring

Pope Benedict XVI, who had an impressive record as a teacher and defender of the basics of Catholic faith, is likely to go down in history books as the first pope in almost 600 years to resign. He is seen among pilgrims during a general audience at the Vatican on Nov. 21, 2007. Pope Benedict died on Dec. 31, 2022, at the age of 95 in his residence at the Vatican.

crises stemming from worsening poverty, AIDS, religious fundamentalism, as well as from what he described in an October 2009 message as the “toxic spiritual garbage” of Western materialism.

In November of 2011, in the apostolic exhortation “Africæ Munus,” Benedict reflected on themes and issues discussed during a Synod of Bishops two years before. He offered African Catholics “guidelines for mission” in becoming “apostles of reconciliation, justice, and peace.” The exhortation was issued during a papal visit to Benin, Benedict’s second to Africa after a pilgrimage to Cameroon and Angola in 2009.

Relationship with the Muslim World

Benedict XVI continued his predecessor’s groundbreaking outreach to other faiths, including Islam. However, his efforts backfired in his second year as pope when, in a September 2006 address on faith and reason at his former university in Regensburg, Germany, the pontiff appeared to link Islam with violence by quoting a one-time Byzantine Emperor’s criticisms of the Prophet Muhammad’s teachings.

The incident came amid tension following the previous year’s publication of anti-Muslim cartoons in Western

Europe, which the new pope had condemned as disrespectful and hurtful. This event, only five years after 9/11, triggered Muslim protests and riots from Gaza to India, as well as a death threat from al-Qaida.

Benedict later apologized for his comments at Regensburg through his Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, saying he regretted that “some passages” from his speech could have “sounded offensive to the sensibilities of Muslim believers.” On a historic visit to Turkey that November, Benedict appealed for Christian-Muslim reconciliation and called on all religious leaders to “refuse support for any form of violence in the name of faith.”

Meanwhile, in an open letter to the pope and other Christian leaders in October of 2007, more than 130 Muslim personalities also urged “peace and a better understanding”—a message taken up by Benedict himself when he addressed the first-ever Catholic-Muslim Forum at the Vatican in November of 2008.

“Catholics and Muslims have the duty to provide a sound education in human, civic, religious, and moral values for their respective members, and to promote accurate information about each other’s religions,” the joint declaration duly noted. “They are called to be instruments of love and harmony among

believers, and for humanity as a whole, renouncing any oppression, aggressive violence, and terrorism, especially that committed in the name of religion, and upholding the principle of justice for all.”

In numerous messages, the pontiff urged Christians to be open to Muslim refugees and migrants, and he warned of growing distrust and disdain for Western secularism and materialism among Muslim societies in Africa and Asia.

“Although his original Regensburg speech marked an initial weak point in (Benedict’s) pontificate, it’s clear retrospectively that the conflict which flowed from it also provided an opportunity for new Catholic-Islamic approaches,” Father Regoli, the Gregorian University professor, told OSV News.

“It also started a top-level dialogue and new forms of cooperation, without which the interfaith work by his successor, Pope Francis, would have been impossible,” he added. “Pope Benedict showed how religious and cultural diplomacy could be put to use in service of a new vision of world harmony.”

The Pope Who Showed the World How to Step Down with Dignity

There have not been many popes in history who have

stepped down from office—indeed Benedict XVI decided on something that seemed unthinkable in the modern papacy. Pope Gregory XII, who stepped down in 1415 to resolve the Great Western Schism after serving as pope for nearly nine years, was the last one to step down before Benedict XVI.

“I think (Pope Benedict’s resignation) was an honest decision by an honest man who really believed that he had reached the end of his physical and perhaps intellectual capacity to give the Church the leadership it needed,” Weigel told OSV News. “I think it was also an act of quite striking humility.”

The decision was shocking both outside and inside the Vatican.

“I remember not understanding the decision completely,” Polish Cardinal Konrad Krajewski told OSV News. “It was for us almost like the world has just crumbled.” Cardinal Krajewski is Pope Francis’ top charity man at the Vatican, where he has served for almost three decades. Hearing that the German pontiff had resigned was painful for him.

“Back then we didn’t see why he made this decision which we now know was very much thought through,” the Polish cardinal said. “But when he became a prayer ‘backup’ for Pope Francis—when he supported the reigning pope with his silent

strength—only then I started to admire his decision and determination, which were driven from his spirituality, responsibility for the Church, and love for the Church.”

Today, almost a decade after Benedict’s resignation, abdication from the papacy is seen as something the Church can expect. Pope Francis himself admitted in a recent interview for Spanish ABC magazine that he had prepared a resignation letter in the event of health problems. It was Benedict XVI who showed the way of this “first” in the modern history of the papacy, offering a lesson in humility and giving an example of what it means to be a pope emeritus.

The resignation of Pope Benedict XVI also brings us back to where we started in this discussion of the pontiff’s global legacy—his Second Vatican Council heritage. Before the council, it was not the norm for bishops to retire. After the council, it became common—though not with the papacy. With his resignation as Bishop of Rome, Benedict built upon Vatican II’s understanding that episcopal leaders could, and perhaps should, relinquish their role in governance—setting a precedent for how future pontificates can approach their time in office. Now, upon his death, many are already calling Benedict XVI “the great.”



CNS photo/Vatican Media

Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, Archpriest of St. Peter's Basilica, kisses the hand of Pope Benedict XVI during a Rite of Reception after the transfer of the late pope's body into St. Peter's Basilica in the early morning at the Vatican on Jan. 2, 2023.

Pope Benedict's Body Solemnly, Lovingly Carried to St. Peter's Basilica

BY CINDY WOODEN

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The consecrated women who cared for Pope Benedict XVI in his retirement gently stroked his hands before his body was carried on a red-covered stretcher to a van for its last journey to St. Peter's Basilica.

The women, members of Memores Domini, along with Archbishop Georg Ganswein, the late pope's personal secretary, and Dr. Patrizio Polisca, Pope Benedict's physician, gathered around the body to pray the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary in the chapel of the Mater Ecclesiae Monastery on Jan. 2 before walking down the hill to the basilica behind the van.

The group set off from the monastery in the Vatican Gardens at 7 a.m. while it was still dark.

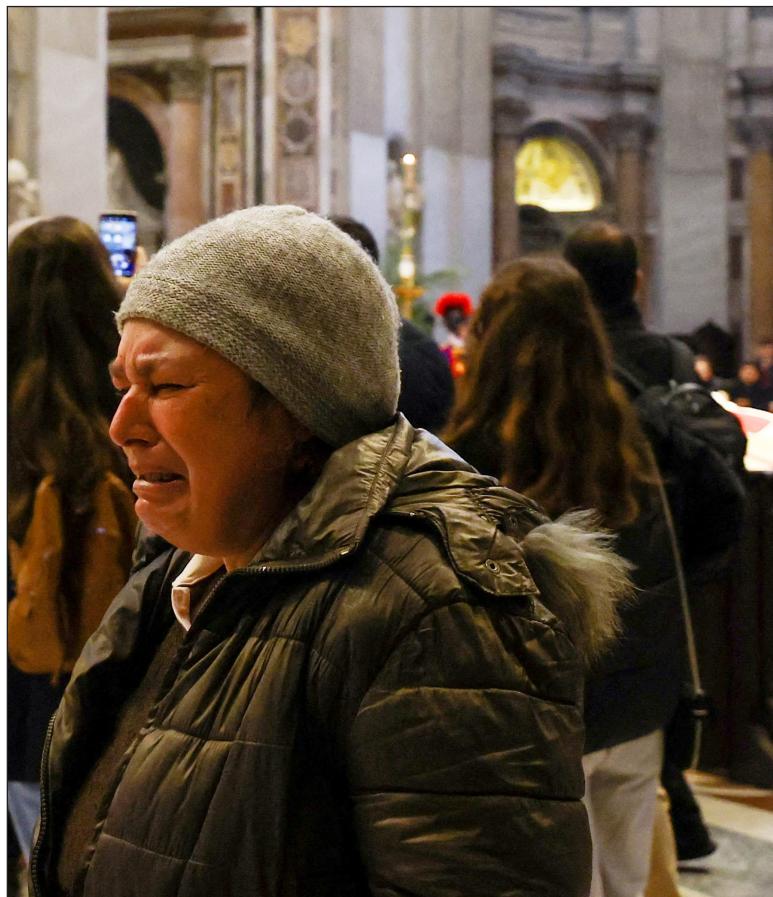
At the Door of Prayer on the south side of the basilica, 10 papal gentlemen dressed in tails carried the body of the retired pope, who died on Dec. 31, into the basilica.

They passed under Gian Lorenzo Bernini's monument to Pope Alexander VII, a sculpture that features a skeleton holding an hourglass — a classic "memento mori" or reminder of the inevitability of death.

Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, Archpriest of St. Peter's Basilica, welcomed the body into the church with a rite of reception that was more elaborate than that used for ordinary

"Dear brothers and sisters, we raise fervent prayers to God the father that he would welcome the departed pope emeritus into his eternal dwelling and increase our faith in the resurrection of the dead."

— Cardinal Mauro Gambetti



CNS photo/Kai Pfaffenbach, Reuters

A woman cries as she pays her respects at the body of Pope Benedict XVI in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican.

prayers to God, ending with the plea, "Have mercy on him."

When the pallbearers had set the late pope's body down, Cardinal Gambetti blessed it with holy water and with incense.

One of the women read, in Italian, from Jesus' prayer to God in the Gospel of John that his disciples would be with him and see his glory "because you loved me before the foundation of the world."

"I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them," the passage concluded.

Cardinal Gambetti told those gathered for the early morning rite, "Dear brothers and sisters, we raise fervent prayers to God the father that he would welcome the departed pope emeritus into his eternal dwelling and increase our faith in the resurrection of the dead."

The rite included prayers for Pope Francis "and all pastors of the church of East and West," for the deceased pope, for the world and for the mourners.

After the singing of the Lord's Prayer and the recitation of the concluding prayer, Cardinal Gambetti went to the body and kissed Pope Benedict's hands.

While the ceremony ended quietly, workers began setting up barriers almost immediately since the basilica opened to the public 90 minutes later so that anyone who wanted to pay their respects could.

Rather than being accompanied by all the cardinals present in Rome, as for the transfer of St. John Paul's body, the small congregation in St. Peter's on Jan. 2 included Pope Benedict's "family" — Archbishop Ganswein and the Memores Domini — the priests who serve as canons of the basilica and the Conventual Franciscans who hear confessions in the church.

The ceremony was not broadcast live, although Vatican Media released photographs and video of the service a few hours later. The Vatican press office used the term "translation" of the body to describe the process of moving it from the monastery where the retired pope had lived.

As Pope Benedict's body was carried to a platform in front of the basilica's main altar, the men of the Sistine Chapel choir led the chanting of the litany of saints in Latin, including the line, "All Roman pontiffs, pray for him."

They also chanted a litany of



CNS photo/Ciro De Luca, Reuters

People queue to enter St. Peter's Basilica to pay their respects to Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican on Jan. 2, 2023.

Thousands Pay Last Respects to Pope Benedict in St. Peter's Basilica

BY CAROL GLATZ

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — A quiet hush covered the vast expanse of St. Peter's Square even though it was filled with thousands of people slowly winding their way around the colonnade into St. Peter's Basilica to pay their last respects to the late Pope Benedict XVI.

Outdoor souvenir sellers were well-stocked with rosaries on Jan. 2, but they seemed to have been caught off guard with a plethora of touristy tchotchkies and few to no images or mementos of the late pope.

A damp chill hung in the air at 9 in the morning when the doors of the basilica opened to the public on the first of three days to view the pope's body.

Special accommodations, however, were made for officials of the Roman Curia, Vatican staff, and dignitaries who were allowed access from the back of the basilica and offered a place to sit or kneel on either side of the pope's body, which was laid out in red vestments on a damask-covered platform.

Before the doors opened to the general public, Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, Archpriest of the Basilica and Papal Vicar for Vatican City State, accompanied Italian President Sergio Mattarella and his entourage and Italian Prime Minister

"I've been privileged to accompany him through his pontificate: I was here in the square when he was elected, I was here in the square when he resigned, and now here when he's lying in state."

— Father Justin Kizewski

Giorgia Meloni and other government ministers to pay homage to the late pope.

The first in line outside the basilica was a group of religious sisters from the Philippines, who said they got there at 5:30 a.m.

People kept slowly arriving before sunrise, including a group from Duluth, Minnesota, and Superior, Wisconsin, led by Father Richard Kunst of Duluth. The priest told Catholic News Service that he was leading a tour of Rome the day Pope Benedict died.

Being able to see and pay homage to the late pope made the group part of "a really incredible piece of history," he said.

Father Kunst said he was "a big fan" of Pope Benedict and "not sad at his passing" since the 95-year-old pope had lived a long life and "this is what he lived for — to be able to be with God."

Father Felipe de Jesús Sánchez, who is from Mexico and is studying in Rome, told CNS that he saw Pope Benedict as "a simple man, humble,

a model, who didn't have as much fame as John Paul II, but he was the mind behind him."

"For me, in my personal opinion, he was an authentic testimony of what it means to be Christian and a disciple of Jesus," he said.

Father Matthew Schmitz was with a group of 90 young people from ECYD, an international Catholic youth organization affiliated with Regnum Christi.

"We were praying while we were waiting, we prayed the rosary" and went inside the basilica in silence, he told CNS.

He said he was in Rome for his studies when Pope Benedict was elected in 2005, and "I met him once after an Easter Mass," which means "I'm still kind of processing" the fact that he found himself back in Rome when the pope died.

Ana Sofia de Luna, who is with ECYD and from Mexico, said, "It's very sad that Pope Benedict died, but being here and seeing his body was a great blessing, to be able to ask for grace and seeing his body there was very impactful."

Daniela Romero, a member

that people keep encountering his works and are brought to the one Church through beauty, that's what really drew me in."

Sugey Viramontes from Mexico told CNS that, "without a doubt, his example of simplicity, and above all how he spent his last few years, always in prayer, is a great example for us young people."

Inside the basilica, staff and security kept visitors moving smoothly and quickly, letting people stop before the pope's remains long enough to make the sign of the cross and take a picture or two before being asked quietly to "Please, move along."

However, many took advantage of the large nooks and niches in the basilica to press up against a wall or barricade and linger just a little while longer.

Pope Benedict's mortal remains were to lie in repose in the basilica for three days until the late evening of Jan. 4; Pope Francis was scheduled to preside over the funeral Mass on Jan. 5.

Rome authorities estimated there would be 30,000 to 35,000 people a day visiting the basilica and an estimated 60,000 people attending the funeral in St. Peter's Square. But Vatican police said that 40,000 people had already entered the basilica to pray by 2 p.m. on Jan. 2.



New York Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan pauses in front of a portrait of Pope Benedict XVI while celebrating Mass for the repose of the late pontiff's soul at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City on Jan. 1, 2023. Before the liturgy, the bells of the cathedral tolled 95 times to mark each year of the late pontiff's life.

Cardinal Says Church is Grateful for Retired Pope's Holiness, Ministry

BY JULIE ASHER

NEW YORK (OSV News) — The death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has brought "a sense of sadness" to the faithful but "also a sense of gratitude ... as we thank almighty God for the good shepherd he was," Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York said in his homily at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Jan. 1, the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God.

The Church is grateful for this "sterling successor of St. Peter who radiated a sense of holiness, theological erudition, and gentle pastoral solicitude, so we miss him," the cardinal said. "There's sadness but, boy, do we ever rejoice that we had him and thank God for that."

At age 95, Pope Benedict "had been with us for quite a while," Cardinal Dolan said. "We came to know and love and respect him, and we miss him, and we mourn him."

Before the Mass began, the cathedral bells tolled 95 times in Benedict's honor. Cardinal Dolan asked all archdiocesan parishes to designate one of their weekend Masses to be celebrated in memory of Pope Benedict.

A portrait of the pontiff, who headed the Catholic Church from 2005 until he retired in 2013, graced the cathedral altar. The congregation that packed the church included many tourists who had been in New York City to watch the traditional Times Square ball drop ushering in the new year.

Cardinal Dolan began his homily by noting that New Year's is traditionally a time when everyone reviews the past year.

"Our hearts, I trust, are filled with gratitude for the grace and mercy of the Lord that got us through 2022," he said. "We

acknowledge that there was a share of sadness and sorrow and challenges and trauma in the world, in our country, the city, indeed within our own hearts, and our families and friends."

"But we also gratefully acknowledge there was a lot of good, and a lot of life, and a lot of joy," he said.

In 2023, the cardinal said, there will be "shares of joy and sorrow ... but we're confident just as God sure got us through the old year, He's going to be there for the new (year)."

He called it a beautiful tradition for the Church to honor Mary under the aspect of her motherhood of Jesus to begin the new year.

"She is a great example of a faithful follower of Jesus, a disciple, not only His mother," Cardinal Dolan said. "But she had her shares of joys and sorrows. She was there at the happiest occasion in human history when the Messiah, Our Savior, was born at Bethlehem."

"But fast forward 33 years, she was also there at the gloomiest day in human history, that Friday strangely called 'good' when the sun hid itself in shame and earth tremored with grief as the Savior of the world died in agony on the cross."

"At both the wood of the crib and the wood of the cross was Mary," the cardinal said.

"Like the year that just passed, the year ahead is probably going to have its Bethlehem moments and its Calvary moments," he noted.

But Cardinal Dolan said Mary's example offers good advice to the faithful about how to weather what's ahead, as if to say, "Stay close to Jesus as I did at Bethlehem and Calvary."

If we do that, "he's going to get us through," the cardinal said.

A Very Innovative Thinker Vicar General Father Mark Gurtner on Pope Benedict XVI

BY JODI MARLIN

Destination: the Vatican.

In 2006, a group of 21 local teenagers, their chaperones, and Father Mark Gurtner, then Pastor of Our Lady of Good Hope Church in Fort Wayne (now Vicar General of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend and Pastor of Our Lady of Good Hope Church), arrived at St. Peter's Square. Members of the pilgrimage were excited to hold tickets to a Wednesday general audience with Pope Benedict XVI.

Most of those tickets were for the general admission area of the square. But thanks to the graciousness of Bishop John M. D'Arcy, four were for an elevated area located up the stairs of St. Peter's Basilica, near the front of the barricades and where the pope sits during the audience. A chaperone, Father Gurtner, and two of the teenagers made their way up front.

"It was a glorious day," without a cloud in the sky, remembered Father Gurtner shortly afterward.

In those days, when the pope finished his general audience, he would go down one side and greet people individually, said Father Gurtner. "Then he'd get in the popemobile and go down the other side. We happened to be pretty much up front on the second side, so when the pope came by, I was able to take his hand and kiss the ring."

For several centuries, kissing the pope's Fisherman's Ring, a symbol of the authority of a pontiff, has been the customary way of demonstrating respect for him and expressing devotion and obedience.

Sixteen years later, Father Gurtner remembers Pope Benedict's visage during the brief encounter.

"When I looked up at him, there was like this glow coming off of him. It was so amazing," He said to the pontiff, "God bless you, Holy Father. You are Peter." The pope responded, but noise from the crowd made his words unintelligible.

Father Gurtner still considers the meeting to have been a great blessing in his life. Long ago, he thanked the Blessed Mother for it: He believes she arranged the encounter for him.

The Greatest Pope Theologian

Pope Benedict's solidity in teaching the faith "in a way that's not stifled" continues to inform and shape various aspects of Father Gurtner's ministry. "He's a very innovative thinker, so if you read a lot of



his writings, he thinks about things of the faith that are very grounded in the faith, but that are not stale," he said. "They're very alive ideas about the faith."

Father Gurtner was also among the priests at World Youth Day in Sydney, Australia, who celebrated the closing Mass with Pope Benedict in 2008. What was nice about Sydney compared to other World Youth Days, he said, was that there were comparatively far fewer people present — around 400,000. During adoration, "everyone was kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament in the park, and it was dead silent. Four hundred thousand people, and it was dead silent when the pope came out with the monstrance. It was very moving."

In recent years, he has read several biographies of the late pope. In 2021, Father Gurtner said it was astounding to him that before Father Joseph Ratzinger became the Archbishop of Munich-Freising in 1977, he was already a widely respected theologian and one of the experts of the Second Vatican Council.

"He really was the one that formed and drove the council. Back then, he was sort of considered a liberal in theological circles. He didn't go off the path, though, like a lot of 'true liberals.'

Some theologians of the age effectively jettisoned the faith, but Ratzinger upheld it. "He's certainly the greatest pope theologian in centuries."

A Life Directed by Divine Providence

Ratzinger came from a very simple family, Father Gurtner pointed out. "It's kind of astounding that from a simple family in a very tiny place, out in Bavaria in the wilderness, that there's this man who became pope." Most of the popes who came before him were from well-connected, well-known families in Rome.

A person cannot help but see the hand of divine providence in his becoming pope and a great theologian, he said. "I find his life, and the drama of his story, just fascinating."

Also interesting, he added, is that the young Joseph Ratzinger was conscripted into the German army during World War II and saw action. When the war was over, he spent time in deplorable

conditions at an American prisoner of war camp.

In hindsight and given the physical condition in which the last years of his life found Pope Benedict XVI, his resignation seems to have been a wise move, Father Gurtner felt. "There was just no way he could have governed the Church; he was so frail."

There was reluctance on Cardinal Ratzinger's part to be in Rome and head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Father Gurtner pointed out, and a well-documented reticence to become pope. "All he ever wanted was to be a normal professor in the academic world. He did not want to be a cardinal, or in the limelight."

He asked Pope John Paul II several times to relieve him of the duty of being head of the CDF. The pope refused.

"So, he was certainly not one who looked for glory, or for the limelight."

During his days as a professor in Germany, his lectures were packed to the gills, Father Gurtner said. His theology was so fresh, so new at that time, that students crammed into the lecture halls to hear him. His theology informs the world in a way most people don't realize.

Before the Second Vatican Council came out, theology was very tied to propositions, as in "'These are the things we believe.' The freshness of Pope Benedict, even as a young theologian, it wasn't just about this proposition and this one, it was about the person of Jesus Christ. We don't realize that that's not what they were preaching and teaching before the Second Vatican Council. It was very much you have to believe this, this, and this, and you have to do these Catholic practices. It was very stilted and ossified."

"He brought a perspective that nobody was bringing. You can see how that would be the fuel for what came from the Second Vatican Council, because it was very much about relationship with Christ, that Jesus is the Word. In fact, one of the arguments he had at the council was with this old guard school that wanted to keep things the way they were and didn't want this sort of new way to think about things to take hold. They maintained an emphasis on the traditional theological expression of how revelation came to us, through Scripture and Tradition. Pope Benedict said, yes, those are the funnels, but there is only one Word of God, and that is Jesus."

"I know that sounds subtle, but it was really revolutionary thinking of that time. And we, now, take it completely for granted because of that."