

Local Catholic leaders praise selection of Pope Francis

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Catholic church leaders in the region were unanimous in their excitement and pleasure at seeing Pope Francis elected Wednesday. Known previously as Jorge Bergoglio, the 76-year-old Jesuit who was cardinal of Argentina, was deemed just what the church needed — a humble, simple man who lived his life as Christ did.

New Britain's St. Francis of Assisi acting pastor Rev. Jerzy Auguscik, whose church shares the saint's name with the new pontif, said the choice of name was a good sign.

"When I heard the name he had chosen and saw the first thing that Francis did when greeting the people, what immediately came to mind was what God said to St. Francis: 'Francis renew my church'," Auguscik said.

"To ask people to pray for the blessing of the Pope, that tells me this Pope is going to be very humble. He's sending a message to the whole church that we have to imitate Christ in his simplicity."

For Auguscik, himself a Franciscan, the new Pope's choice of name was doubly sweet. St. Francis was a rich young man from Assisi who renounced wealth and founded the Franciscan order of friars in 1290.

At Bristol's St. Anthony's Church, the Rev. Alphonso Fontana echoed the thoughts of Auguscik, remarking of the pope's humble nature in asking for a blessing.

"He wants the people with him. The sign of that was him asking the people to bless him, which is such an act of humility," Fontana said.

"He comes from a humble background. His parents were immigrants from Italy and his father was a railroad worker. He's a man that looks like he exudes Christ's presence. I had goosebumps."

That kind of leadership is just in time, according to Fontana.

"What the church really needs right now is a pope of orthodoxy, humility and leadership," he said. "And wasn't that the way Christ was? He's coming to serve us. When he asked for that blessing, he said 'I'm here to serve you'."

While not many knew of the Argentinian cardinal before today, Auguscik compared this to the election of John Paul II. People knew little of him, yet he went on to become one of the most loved popes in history.

Area children were also included in the excitement when the white smoke billowed out of the Vatican chimney.

At St. Paul Catholic Church and School in Kensington, the friars joined school children to watch events unfold on CNN.

Principal Fayne Molloy said goosebumps were also on order for all.

“As they’re watching it unfold on CNN, they are just in awe seeing the Swiss Guard marching in and all the pomp and circumstance,” Molloy said. “This is a very good way for them to feel connected to their faith. The church bells here were ringing at St. Paul’s at the same time they were ringing in Rome. They’re really getting a feeling for how universal their faith is. It’s amazing for them to know they’re part of the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics.”

Southington’s St. Dominic Catholic School made an announcement calling for all the teachers to turn on their SMART Boards so their students could see history in the making.

While New Britain’s Sacred Heart School had dismissed children by the time the announcement came, Monsignor Daniel Plocharczyk said the church rang its bells in unison with other Catholic churches around the world.

“It’s good that the Catholic Church has a leader for the first time since Feb. 28,” Plocharczyk said.

“At Mass, we couldn’t say any name because we haven’t had a pope. We will be able to say his name for the first time tonight at the 6:30 Mass.”