Obituary

Born: Tuesday, May 18, 1920
Died: Saturday, April 2, 2005

Pope John Paul II, who was known as Karol Jozef Wojtyla until his election to the papacy, was born in Poland in 1920.

The second of two sons, by the age of 21 Karol Wojtyla was the only surviving member of his family - his mother dying in 1929, his brother in 1932 and his father in 1941.

Involved in the Church from birth, he made his first Holy Communion at the age of nine, and was confirmed at the age of 18.

Service Summary

- Service details not available -

An artistic man, Karol Wojtyla enrolled in a drama school on completion of high school, and in Cracow's Jagiellonian University.

However, Nazi occupation forces closed the university, and Karol Wojtyla was forced to work in a quarry and then a chemical factory to avoid being deported. By 1942, Karol Wojtyla was aware of his call to the priesthood. He began clandestine courses at a Cracow seminary, and at the same time, was one of the pioneers of the clandestine "Rhapsodic Theatre".

At the conclusion of World War II, Karol Wojtyla continued his studies at the seminary, and recommenced his study of theology at the Jagiellonian University, which had reopened.

In 1946, he was ordained.

Shortly after his ordination, Karol Wojtyla went to Rome where he worked under the guidance of the French Dominican, Garrigou-Lagrange.

He completed a doctorate in theology in 1948, while exercising his pastoral ministry among the Polish immigrants of France, Belgium and Holland during his vacations.

On his return to Poland, Karol Wojtyla continued his
theological studies, eventually becoming a professor of moral theology and social ethics.

On July 4, 1958, Pope Pius XII appointed him Auxiliary Bishop of Cracow.

Pope Paul VI then appointed him to the role of Archbishop of Cracow, and made him a cardinal in 1967.

As a cardinal, Karol Wojtyla participated in Vatican Council II and all the assemblies of the Synod of Bishops.

In 1978, he became Pope and adopted the name John Paul II. He was the Catholic Church's first non-Italian pontiff in over 450 years and history's first Slavic pope.

Travelling widely since his Pontificate, Pope John Paul gave general audiences to more than 16 million pilgrims. His travels earned him the nickname the 'globetrotting pope'.

He spoke eight different languages, learning Spanish after becoming Pope.

Pope John Paul II was shot May 13, 1981 at Saint Peter's square by a Turkish extremist, Mehmet Ali Agca.

In 1983, the Pope met with his would-be assassin in Rome's Rebibbia prison to forgive him.

He visited Australia twice as head of the Catholic Church, the second time in 1995 to beatify Mary MacKillop.

His first visit to Australia as Pope was in 1986.

"I come as a friend to urge you, pursue your lives, all those values worth of the human person, to encourage you to be open-hearted, generous to the unfortunate and caring towards those who are pushed to the margins of life," he urged Australians.

His messages, regardless of where he was in the world, focused on human rights, particularly the rights of children.
He also chastised Western nations and communist countries, viewing communism and capitalism as flip sides of a coin, neither of which would lead to happiness.

Since his accession to the Pontificate, he restored conservative stances on abortion, contraception, biotechnology, and the place of women in the Church.


In 1994, Time magazine named him 'Man of the Year'.

In later years Pope John Paul II developed Parkinson's disease, and increasingly began to rely on his cardinals to carry out some of his ceremonial duties. At Easter 2002, he was unable to carry out the washing of the feet ceremony, which is symbolic of the Last Supper. It was the first time the role had been performed by cardinals.

In an unprecedented gesture, the Pope publicly apologised for the past misdeeds of the Catholic church.

He was also forced to deal with the sex abuse scandal that was engulfing the Catholic Church, calling an emergency meeting with US cardinals in Rome. In an address to bishops from north-eastern states, he them to give more guidance to Catholic priests in their country to prevent another child sex abuse scandal.

He also called on the clergy to work for greater dialogue with other faiths in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States.

The Pope's schedule was relentless. In 2003, he travelled to Pompei, Slovakia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Spain. As his health continued to deteriorate his visited Switzerland in June 2004 - his first foreign trip for nine months. In August 2004 he visted Lourdes on a two-day pilgrimage to one of the Roman Catholic world's most revered shrines. It was his second pilgrimage to the shrine in southern France.
In early 2005 his health deteriorated further, and the Pontiff spent 28 days in hospital in two periods in February and March. During the second hospital stay he underwent a tracheotomy to ease respiratory problems. The surgery rendered the man once known as 'the great communicator' unable to speak.

Despite the surgery he continued to deteriorate, eventually suffering a heart attack and septic shock from a urinary tract infection.

The Vatican announced that the Pontiff died at 9:37pm on Saturday April 2, 2005.