

A special LI link to Benedict

Jewish papal knight from Wantagh says retired pontiff was 'very special'

BY GRANT PARPAN

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While most Long Islanders woke up Saturday to news from the Vatican about the retired pontiff's death, the Vatican awakened Gary Krupp with the news.

Krupp, a 75-year-old Jewish papal knight who met with Pope Benedict XVI on 19 occasions, had a close and unique connection to the man. So much so that the Wantagh resident got calls from Rome notifying him of Benedict's passing Saturday.

"He was just a fantastic, very shy, very pensive, brilliant, scholarly . . . he was a very special person," Krupp said.

Krupp, who a New York Times columnist once de-

scribed as "the Vatican's most outspoken Jewish ally," heads Pave the Way Foundation, a nonsectarian organization whose mission is to identify and eliminate nontheological obstacles between religions.

His most notable work with the Vatican centered on whether Pope Pius XII, the pontiff during World War II, did enough to save Jews from the Holocaust.

Krupp said his organization's work extended beyond Catholicism and Judaism to many other religions, but was not religious work.

"We deal with obstacles and problems and so it's unusual," he said. "We don't deal with religion ever. That's like walking in deep mud."



Gary Krupp, of Wantagh, meets with Pope Benedict XVI on April 14, 2008.

Krupp received the honorary title as Commendatore Gary Krupp, Knight Commander of the Pontifical Equestrian Order of St. Gregory the Great from Pope John Paul II in 2000.

A retired medical equipment dealer, he was awarded his title after persuading manufacturers to donate more than \$10 million in medical equipment to an Italian hospital.

Benedict, who had a love of history, gave Krupp papal authority to use Vatican docu-

ments on his organization's website free of copyright restrictions.

Krupp said his relationship with Benedict, who came of age in Nazi Germany as Pius XII led the Roman Catholic Church, grew from the respect the retired pope had for his organization's work toward religious reconciliation.

As a member of the papal household, Krupp was notified of the retired pope's death via a telephone call from the Vatican

secretary of state at 4 a.m. Saturday.

"We sort of expected this to happen," Krupp said of Benedict's death, saying he had gotten health updates from a German colleague. "This is what life is."

Krupp noted that Benedict did a lot of work to advance his foundation's mission, saying they "now have an advocate in heaven."

"He was a loving man," Krupp said. "It's very, very sad."

Long Islanders react to retired pope's death

REACTION from A3

Centre, an active leader at the St. Agnes school and parish, described Benedict as a "gentle intellectual." She admired the way he "stayed under the radar" after Pope Francis took the reins.

"In giving up the papacy, he was true to himself," Boylan said. "And I think that took a lot of courage to do that. He's served us well."

Visitors to St. Agnes on Saturday said given his age and recent reports of his health they were not surprised to learn of his passing, but it was nevertheless a sadder day.

"Just God bless him," said Audrey Lavin of Carle Place. "God bless all of us."

Kathy Hutchinson of Valley Stream said she's thankful for the guidance and direction of

the retired pope.

Phyllis Zagano, a research associate at Hofstra University who has studied the role of women in the church, said that Benedict, whom she described as an "extraordinary theologian," played a central part in "almost all major church discussions throughout the latter part of the 20th and early 21st century."

Specific to her own studies, Zagano noted that while Benedict is "known as the architect of every contemporary statement against women priests," he codified the distinction between the priesthood and the diaconate, paving the way for female deacons.

Benedict's legacy is clouded by the church's handling of the sex abuse scandal that erupted in his time as a cardinal, continued into his time as pope and returned in the form of a report

earlier this year that revealed he personally mishandled four abuse cases while he was an archbishop in Germany.

For Long Island survivors of the abuse, his death has given rise to mixed feelings.

"Nobody's happy when a pope dies, but Benedict has endangered children around the world," said Mary McKenna of the Nassau County chapter of SNAP, a group of clergy sex abuse survivors.

McKenna noted that Benedict was, however, the first pope to act against the abuse, leaving a legacy of "pros and cons" for survivors.

Duffy spoke of having an audience with the pope, a powerful encounter in Rome in 2005 that he said bolstered his calling to become a priest. Twenty years old at the time, he was among thousands in an audi-

ence hall when the pope approached him. He shouted, "Holy Father, I want to be a priest!"

"He spun around on his heels and he came right over to me and he grabbed me with two hands, and he shook me and he blessed me and I kissed his ring," Duffy said.

In a statement Saturday, Barres praised Benedict as a "great theologian and pope."

"Growing up in Nazi Germany and experiencing firsthand the bitter fruits of Nazi ideology, Pope Benedict XVI understood that ideas have consequences in history," Barres said. "As a result, throughout his life, as a priest, professor, bishop, cardinal and pope, he championed the Catholic belief in the harmony of faith and reason — a principle that is so critical to the unity of truth and so

vital to Catholic identity, missionary activity, harmonious ecumenical and interreligious charity and peace in the world."

He added: "Today, we pray for the soul of this great pope and give thanks for how the Holy Spirit led him and inspired us."

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, archbishop of New York, offered prayers at St. Patrick's Cathedral for Benedict Saturday morning. In a statement, he described the retired pope as an "erudite, wise, and holy man, who spoke the truth with love."

"The family of the Church especially mourns his death, while grateful for the gift he was of a good shepherd and Holy Father," Cardinal Dolan wrote. "This archdiocese remembers with love his pastoral visit here in 2008."