

# Reaction

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said she would be watching, and if they chose a new pope, she would come get the students.” Teachers and staff were watching the papal process on television and over the Internet, Manning said. Many Sacred Heart students weren’t even born when Pope John Paul II died in 2005 and Benedict became pontiff. In addition, Pope Benedict marked the first papal resignation in more than 600 years. “It has definitely affected our teaching (about the process),” Manning said. “When we used to talk about the election of a pope and how the election worked, we didn’t touch on resignation. Usually, the pope served until death.” Manning found himself in papal transition Wednesday as he traveled from one school to another.

“Just as I was leaving the elementary school, the white smoke was billowing, but we hadn’t heard who (the new pope) was yet,” he said. “When I got to the middle school, they were learning the name of the new pope, so I got to witness it (through the students’ eyes) at both age levels.”

Manning could relate to Wednesday’s scene at St. Peter’s Basilica, as he and his wife visited the Vatican — including the Sistine Chapel — for their 10th wedding anniversary.

In addition, Manning and other Sacred Heart School staff heard Cardinal Donald Wuerl from Washington — who helped elect the new pope this week — speak in recent years at a National Catholic Education Association conference in Minneapolis.

Manning said he found the entire papal election to be a fascinating educational experience. “I’m a cradle Catholic, but I’m always yearning to learn more about the Catholic faith,” he said. “Through all of this, I have learned so much about the popes and how they are elected.”

## SISTER MARY KAY PANOWICZ

At Sacred Heart Monastery, Sister Mary Kay Panowicz pealed the bells to celebrate the new pope’s election.

“In Rome, they rang the bells when a new pope was elected,” she said. “We waited until the new pope actually came out on the balcony and we knew who it was.”

The Benedictine Sisters were following Wednesday’s developments very closely, Sister Mary Kay said. “As soon as we learned that somebody was elected, the TVs went on quite quickly. I was watching on the Internet, while other Sisters watched on television,” she said.

Pope Francis comes from Argentina and knows the poverty of his nation and much of the world, she said.

“He lives in an apartment and rides a bus to work. For a cardinal, that’s quite unusual. He is a humble man,” the nun said. “The name Francis has never been taken (for a pope). Francis was known as a man of simplicity, of poverty, a man going out to the people. It’s an indication of the person he wants to be.”

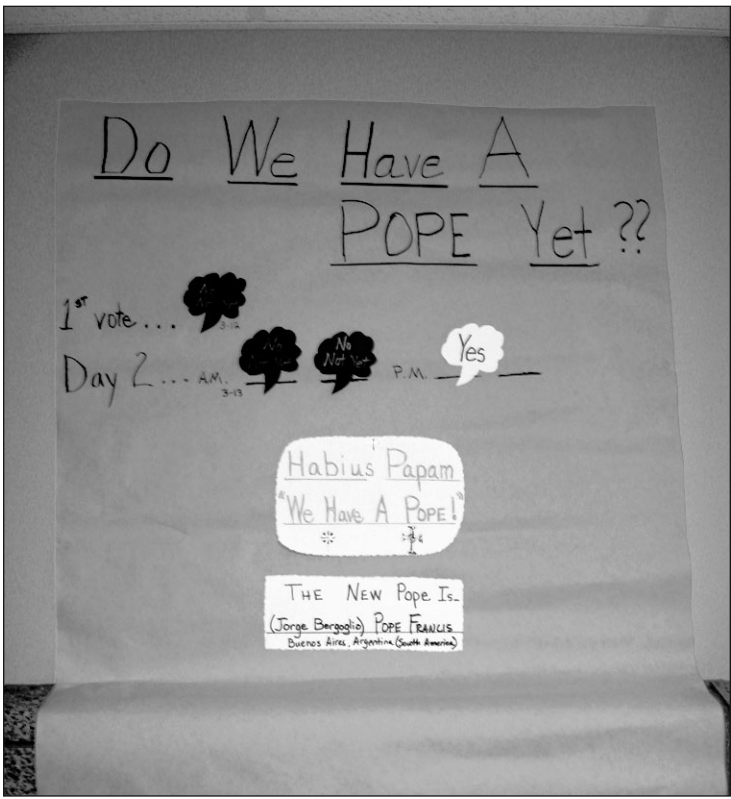
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COURTESY PHOTO  
The Sacred Heart students used a poster, tracking each round of the cardinals’ voting for a new pontiff. The poster featured black smokes during the first four rounds, then switched to white smoke and the news of electing Pope Francis I.

Pope Francis also comes from Latin America, home to about 40 percent of the world’s Catholics, Sister Mary Kay said.

“The church is universal, and so to have somebody from a country that’s non-European, I think it’s pretty significant,” she said.

Sister Mary Kay saw the church’s universality during a

papal audience while she studied in Rome for five weeks in 2008. The crowd was greeted in several different languages from around the world.

Pope Francis will bring his own personal gifts to the papacy, Sister Mary Kay said.

“The pope provides spiritual leadership, and he brings the Gospel to the world,” she said.

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“As a Catholic, I’m excited about the new pope. I’m excited that it’s somebody so different. He’s Jesuit, he’s from Latin America and he’s a humble man, a simple man. Yet as a Jesuit, he’s well educated. And as an Argentinean of Italian descent, Francis is a bridge between the old and new world.”

## HELEN CIERNICK

Mount Marty College theology professor Helen Ciernick finds great excitement as Pope Francis breaks new ground on several fronts.

“As a Catholic, I’m excited about the new pope. I’m excited that it’s somebody so different,” she said. “He’s Jesuit, he’s from Latin America and he’s a humble man, a simple man. Yet as a Jesuit, he’s well educated. And as an Argentinean of Italian descent, Francis is a bridge between the old and new world.”

Ciernick found some disagreement among her students concerning Benedict’s decision to retire.

“A student commented, when Benedict resigned, that she felt abandoned. John Paul II had died in office, but Benedict resigned after eight years,” Ciernick said.

“I asked her, if your grandfather was in his 80s, would she want him to handle the responsibilities of an international organization with all of its stresses. She said no.”

Ciernick noted the quick transition to a new pontiff in the age of cyberspace.

“The Vatican website had Benedict’s crest, but when he resigned, they put on the seal for the vacant (Holy) See,” she said. “You can check out www.vatican.va for more information, and it’s already been changed for Pope Francis.”

Ciernick finds special significance in the new pontiff’s name.

Most people think of St. Francis of Assisi, who came from a wealthy family and turned away from his family and wealth, she said. The new pope’s name could also be taken for Francis Xavier, a friend of St. Ignatius Loyola, the Jesuit founder, she said.

Ciernick believes the new pope will bring a new emphasis. “Benedict was concerned about secularism, but Francis will emphasize social justice,” she said.

Francis also represents the rapidly shifting demographics of the church, Ciernick said.

“Today, 501 million Catholics live in Latin America, while there are 85 million Catholics in North America and 265 million Catholics in Europe,” she said.

“The church is growing in the Southern Hemisphere, including Africa, Asia and South America, and it’s shrinking in the Northern Hemisphere.”

Francis will emphasize a reawakening of people to the spirit of God, and he will also be good for ecumenical relations and tackling the sex abuse scandal that has rocked the church, Ciernick predicted. She believes he will continue the church’s traditional teachings on sexual matters.

“There are times it’s important to move away from tradition, and there are other times to stay true to tradition,” she said. “The pope is a symbol of the unity of the church and being a servant of the servants.”

Pope Francis leads his flock into a new and challenging era, Ciernick said.

“For Christian churches, it’s not a question of modernization,” she said. “It’s about delivering the message of Christ and if we’re being true to it.”

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at twitter.com/RDockendorf

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