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# Poland Mourns Death of Polish-Born Pope

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No country is taking the death of Pope John Paul II harder than his native Poland, where he will always be considered a national hero.

Across Poland, church bells are tolling as many thousands of the faithful hold vigils for John Paul, the Polish-born priest who came to lead the billion-member Catholic Church.

In the pope's hometown of Wadowice, mourners packed the local church to overflowing. They also laid out candles in the shape of a cross in front of the pope's boyhood home.

Special prayers were said for John Paul in nearby Krakow, where the pope had served as archbishop before his election to the papacy.

Mourners carrying flowers and lighting candles filled the streets of Warsaw in an outpouring of grief and admiration.

John Paul is considered a hero by his fellow Poles for his inspirational role in leading Poland to overthrow communism.

John Paul also is the source of great national pride because he became the first non-Italian to become pope in more than 400 years.

Polish President Aleksandar Kwasniewski, a former communist official and religious agnostic, calls John Paul Poland's most eminent countryman. The president has ordered an official mourning period from Saturday until the pope's funeral.