

New Pope already has York Catholics talking

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

As adults around him fret about the impact of having "God's Rottweiler" as the Catholic church's new Pope, young Raphael Soldi has no such reservations.

"He knows much more than we do. He's guided by the spirit of the Holy Spirit so he'll know best what to do," said the Grade 8 student at Pope John Paul II Catholic School in Richmond Hill.

The school was abuzz Tuesday afternoon with discussion about the speed with which the conclave

of Cardinals chose Joseph Ratzinger to lead the world's 1.1 billion Catholics and speculation about the type of spiritual leader the conservative theologian will be.

"People in my class were a little bit shocked (the Pope was elected so quickly)," Raphael said.

Sizing up Pope Benedict XVI has been a popular activity in York Region over the past two days.

Sam Ciccolini, president of the parish council at Woodbridge's St. Margaret Mary Roman Catholic Church since 1984, is concerned about Pope Benedict's hardline

stand on issues such as ordaining women as priests, homosexuality, de-centralizing power from the Vatican, allowing priests to marry and birth control.

Pope Benedict has been called Pope John Paul's closest adviser on religious matters but a man who lacks his predecessor's charisma.

"I think they (the Vatican) need to open up a little bit but they're not," Mr. Ciccolini said.

"People are saying if they don't come up to the standards of 2005, why should I go to church and read the Bible?"

He's also upset a Latin American or Mexican cardinal wasn't selected as pope because it would have shown the Catholic church is reaching out to new communities.

However, Mr. Ciccolini thinks the 78-year-old Pope Benedict will serve as a transitional pontiff.

"I see Ratzinger as a stepping stone. He's 78 years old, he's had some bouts with his health although he's OK now," he said.

"But, at 78, he's not a spring chicken. I think he's a stepping stone to a moderate pope."

Klaus Wagener, president of the

German Canadian Club of Newmarket, was thrilled when the white smoke at St. Peter's Square ushered in a German cardinal as pope.

"Of course, there is joy everywhere. In general, everyone is happy. We're very honoured, very proud that a German cardinal became pope," he said.

However, Mr. Wagener, who is not Catholic, shares concerns about Pope Benedict's conservative stand on social issues.

"I think German Catholics and Canadian-German Catholics would have liked a more liberal pope."

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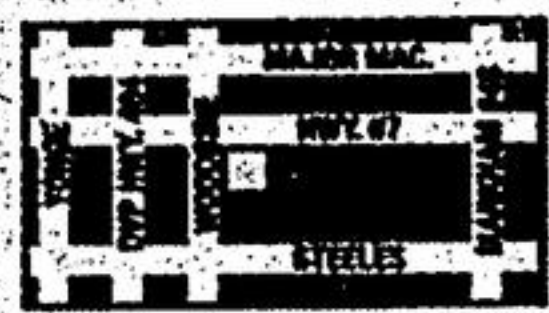
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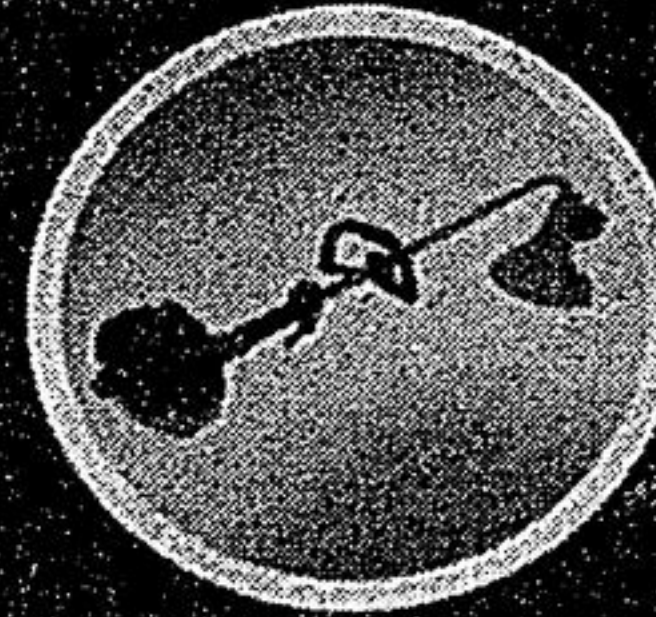


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