

# Pole dies day before he was to be named cardinal

WARSAW, Poland - Retired Polish Bishop Ignacy Jez of Koszalin-Kolobrzeg, a Nazi-concentration-camp survivor, died just one day before he would have been named a cardinal.

"It was optimism which enabled Bishop Jez to survive the hardest times," said Polish Archbishop Marian Golebiewski of Wroclaw, a former colleague, in an interview with Poland's Catholic Information Agency, KAI, Oct. 17. "He was a witness to the famous letter sent by Polish bishops to German counterparts in 1965, as well as to the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyla as pope and the rule of Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski. His departure symbolically ends an epoch."

Poland's oldest bishop died Oct. 16 at the age of 93 in Rome's Gemelli hospital during a pilgrimage. He recently had celebrated 70 years as a priest.

Announcing 23 new cardinals Oct. 17, Pope Benedict XVI said he had planned to honor the "well-deserving prelate," but had been prevented by his death.

Bishop Edward Dajczak of Koszalin-Kolobrzeg said he had told Bishop Jez of the nomination by phone, at the Vatican's request, as Bishop Jez waited at the airport for his flight to Rome.

"He just said, 'God, what's going on?'" Bishop Dajczak told KAI Oct. 17. "I managed to add that I embraced him from a distance in my heart. As usual, he joked back, remarking, 'Careful, careful - don't hug an old man, because you could smother me.'"

Born near Tarnow in 1914, Bishop Jez was ordained a priest in 1937 and was sent to the German Dachau concentration camp in 1942 for celebrating a funeral for his parish rector, Blessed Jozef Czempiel, who died at Nazi hands.

Bishop Jez, who said he had helped organize pastoral and medical help for fellow prisoners, told KAI in 2004 that camp prisoners, who included 1,800 Polish priests,

had been “left only with life and the overriding wish to save it.”

He was appointed auxiliary bishop of Gniezno in 1960, and 12 years later he was named the first bishop of Koszalin-Kolobrzeg, a newly created diocese that he built up despite obstacles from Poland’s communists.

Though he retired in 1992, the bishop continued to minister and travel widely, receiving state honors from Poland and Germany for his work to build reconciliation.

Bishop Jez was to be buried in Koszalin Oct. 23.