

## Pope's pal honored

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On Sunday, Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Punta Gorda will celebrate 25 years of ministry by the Rev. Walter Swietek, an associate pastor of the parish. Swietek came to the United States in 1971 from his native Poland.

Swietek, 50, is an old friend of the world's most famous Polish priest. When he was a youth he often went ski-jumping with the young Karol Wojtyla, who was at seminary with Swietek's older brother, Karol. Wojtyla went on to become Pope John Paul II. Swietek expects to visit John Paul when he returns to Poland to celebrate the anniversary of his ordination on June 24. The pope will also be in Poland at that time.

The priest said he was overjoyed, but not terribly surprised, when his old friend became pope in 1978.

"You see, there was a feeling about that," he said. His brother Karol was a priest in the parish where Wojtyla was the cardinal archbishop in Krakow, Poland. When Swietek spoke with his brother before emigrating in 1971, his brother remarked, "Some day we will have a Polish pope."

"Everything is in God's hands," Swietek said he replied.

Swietek has survived tragedies of both personal and global proportions. His brother Joseph died fighting German soldiers during the Nazi occupation of Poland. In 1975, his brother Karol died from illnesses with which he was stricken during three years as a political prisoner of the Polish government, he said.

His brother was jailed and tortured for preaching sermons demanding religious freedom, Swietek said. Karol's death "had an overwhelming impact on me as years have passed in my service for our freedom and your freedom," Swietek said.

Swietek came to the Diocese of Venice last year after 15 years on Long Island. A noon Mass, with a reception following, will be held in Swietek's honor Sunday at Sacred Heart.