

Extrait du Petites Soeurs de l'Assomption

<http://www.assomption-psa.org/pope-francis-and-the-little>

POPE FRANCIS AND THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE ASSUMPTION A STORY OF LOVE AND SERVICE



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Petites Soeurs de l'Assomption

The first Little Sisters of the Assumption arrived in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1910 and later spread out to other countries in Latin America. That is something we celebrated and recounted on this page.

The first community was located in a working-class and poor area, with many tenements. In 1932 a second community was opened in a more outlying area and settled in the district of Flores where there were simple houses, working families and many immigrants.

One of these families were the couple Mario José Bergoglio and Regina María Sívori, Italian immigrants. This working family asked for the help of the Little Sisters when their first child, Jorge Mario, was born on the 17th of December 1936. *"In our house we liked them very much. My grandmother was one of their 'Moniques'. One of the sisters took me in her arms after I was born."* It was an Irish sister (Sr Oliva) who gave them the care they needed. The following year a girl was born and they again called on the sisters. This time it was Sister Antonia Ariceta (Argentinian) who cared for them, looking after the mother and the two children, since Jorge was still very small. Their parents and grandmother became active members of the Fraternity and of the Daughters of St Monica, groups of laity that were very dynamic in the Flores community. *"My father and my mother talked to us of the Little Sisters. They used to go zealously to houses where there was a woman who needed to be helped with the housework, prepare the children to go to school etc., a poor woman who could not pay for this help. Servants, poor servants, that used to make a deep impression on me always. They told us that they had the Rule of St Augustine.' 'From time to time my father or my mother, but more often my father, used to take us to visit them in the Calle Junta. When it rained heavily this street used to be flooded and we had to cross over by a bridge. In the district they were called "the Little Sisters of the bridge" because of this bridge that had to be crossed."*

Jorge Mario kept, as something very precious, the cross that used to be given to the "Monicas" and which had belonged to his grandmother.

On one occasion he mentioned that he kept it beside his bed and "it is the first thing I see when I wake up."

[/IMG/image/papa1.jpg]

Jorge Mario Bergoglio, a young priest, with his parents, sisters and brothers

He kept up close contact with the sisters and, after he was appointed Archbishop of Buenos Aires, he used to visit Sr Antonia and the La Inmaculada community regularly, keeping up a close and fraternal contact.

When Antonia celebrated her diamond jubilee, in January 1999, he celebrated the Eucharist in our house, recalling with great affection that she had carried him in her arms when he was a baby and all the care he had received; both of them recounted some vivid anecdotes.

He asked us to keep him informed about Antonia's health, particularly as she was getting older. So we had very frequent and easy contact with him.

[/IMG/image/papa2.jpg][/IMG/image/papa3.jpg]

On various occasions he talked with some sisters who worked in the hospital for infectious diseases and in Villa 6, and his pastoral or spontaneous visits to the families of the Villa were marked by special attention to the sick, especially the poorest and weakest.

On the 15th of August 2010 he presided at the celebration for the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the Little Sisters in Argentina. He ended his homily as follows: *"Today, on this feast of the Virgin Mary, when she is recognised by Jesus the Servant, let us recall that it is she who cared for him by serving. Let us look at Mary, always ready to serve, and let us give thanks to God that in Argentina women religious have organised to carry out his mission. At that time people did not yet dare to talk about 'insertion' but, nevertheless, they were inserted to their fingertips. We give*

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thanks to God because these religious live according to the charism of Father Etienne Pernet and of Mother Marie de Jésus and because, through their humble work, they have showed in a practical way to our people that Mary is a mother and that the Church is a mother."

[/IMG/image/papa4.jpg][/IMG/image/papa5.jpg]

Cardinal Bergoglio with Gerardo, a permanent deacon and member of the "Assumption Family" lay group

That is the reason why we wanted to share with you the bonds that unite us to this priest who grew up in a family that shared the charism and the spirituality of our Congregation and who now, by the will of God, is our Pope Francis. We rejoice with the whole Church and with all those who, whatever their religion, share in this special time.

[/IMG/image/papa6.jpg]It is surprising to see (at least in Argentina) the positive reaction of people who, while not being Catholics, show that they now have more hope and the desire to continue working for justice, peace and the dignity of persons. … They have the desire to continue struggling against corruption, insecurity etc., in the midst of the complex situation that is ours, whereas they had been very discontented and weary from struggling. May the Holy Spirit enlighten Francis in this difficult mission, and may the little Virgin of Luján (to whom he has great devotion) protect and encourage him, as she encouraged her son Jesus.

The Little Sisters of the Southern Zone of Latin America