

# NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER

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## Radiating with life



—Horacio "Tati" di Renzi

A youth group from the Virgin of Caacupé Parish in Buenos Aires, Argentina, gathers before Fr. Lorenzo "Toto" de Vedia Sept. 5.

## Cuba and US anticipate visit from Francis

By NCR STAFF

**VATICAN CITY and WASHINGTON** · As this issue of NCR was going to press, Pope Francis had not yet embarked on his trip to Cuba and the United States, but anticipation and anxiety were running high among Vatican and local organizers, security personnel, and millions of Catholics.

It is Francis' 10th foreign trip, his longest — he will be away from the Vatican Sept. 19-28 — and by far his most complex, according to Vatican spokesman Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, who briefed the press Sept. 15.

A year ago, Francis had committed to visiting the United States for the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. Later, the trip was "enriched," according to Lombardi, first to include a visit to the United Nations. There, world leaders will be opening a conference to discuss and adopt international goals about sustainable development, issues Francis has often addressed.

After the United States and Cuba announced they were moving toward

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## Buenos Aires slums and the families who live there have shaped a papacy

By SOLI SALGADO



—Horacio "Tati" di Renzi

Residents of Villa 21 wander the streets outside the Virgin of Caacupé Church.

**BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA** · Peeking above the highways of Buenos Aires, flimsy stacks of tiny homes—mostly made of decayed brick and rusted metal—form a jagged skyline against the Parisian-inspired capital.

It's a sight known to all Buenos Aires locals, but, for most, known only from a distance, as common knowledge bodes against entering these *villas*, or slums, without an insider at your side. Media portrayals of violence and poverty then

become the public's only window into these closed-off barrios. Oftentimes, the only person from the slums most middle-class families know is their maid, whom they rarely see outside their own homes.

In 2013, more than one in four Argentines were living in poverty, and these shantytowns exploded upward as home after rickety home joined the pile. Immigrants from Paraguay and Bolivia who sought a promising life in the "Paris of the Americas" were instead ushered to

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### FRANCIS IN THE UNITED STATES



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## Women carry on push for ordination

By THOMAS C. FOX

Some 500 Catholic activists from around the globe were to converge on Philadelphia for a three-day conference Sept. 18-20 to press for women's rights in the church. The meeting was one week before Pope Francis was to step foot into the city.

The U.S.-based Women's Ordination Conference (WOC) is hosting the Women's Ordination Worldwide meeting. The U.S. group formed 40 years back, in 1975, after a group of

women's ordination advocates met in Detroit. Women's Ordination Worldwide (WOW), an assembly of international groups supporting women's ordination, formed in 1996; the U.S. Women's Ordination Conference is a member.

The three-day gathering, scheduled for after NCR went to press, intended to assess the place of women in church and society and to develop plans to advance their Gospel-based justice agendas. Delegates were also to

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Mercy Sr. Teresa Kane

This issue was mailed on Sept. 18.



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Nuns tour US with plea against division

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## BUENOS AIRES: MATRIARCHAL HOUSEHOLDS

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these neighborhoods, where more than half a million reside.

But it wasn't until Jorge Mario Bergoglio's name was announced in 2013 as the newly elected Pope Francis that these slums started to shed their one-dimensional depictions. Life in the slums is a far cry from its picturesque backdrop, but it's that family life that Francis knows best, those people who touched him most, and those experiences that have shaped his papacy.

### Family dynamics

In Villa 21, Buenos Aires' largest slum, located in the Barracas neighborhood with a population nearing 50,000, roughly four in five residents are Paraguayan immigrants.

"Paraguayans tend to have a stronger spiritual formation than Argentines, and that affects the way they work," said Fr. José María di Paola, known throughout the slums as "Padre Pepe." He was the head pastor in Villa 21 for 14 years until 2012, when Bergoglio relocated him following death threats.

A typical family from this *villa* might have a father in construction and a mother working as a maid, he said. But while the man may be the breadwinner, households tend to be matriarchal in most shantytowns in Buenos Aires. The woman, di Paola said, is the "constant" in the home, the one who organizes family life.

"Unfortunately, life decisions are made very early," he said. "Many of them already have kids by age 15, and it's then harder for them to stabilize their lives because they've burned through important life stages. Their maturity only comes after they've already had kids."

Starting families at a young age also ropes in the older generations as caretakers. Grandparents watch the kids while the parents are at work, and because siblings often raise their children together, cousins living under the same roof share their grandparents as parental figures.

Despite growing up with close ties to their grandparents, Padre Pepe said, a "spiritual disconnect" still exists between generations. While older family members tend to preserve their faith and maintain traditions, there's a notable "rupture" in those practices among the younger generations, he said.

Juan Cruz Hermida coordinates the Social Commitment and Extension group at the Catholic University of Argentina in Buenos Aires. The volunteer effort, which Bergoglio initiated in 2010, leads students into the shantytowns to help those living on the peripheries. Having worked with a number of families in several *villas* across several cities, Hermida said that despite living in the heart of the city, these families have more in common with Argentina's rural life.

"Families in the slums collaborate far more and know each other well,"



—CNS/David Agren

Fr. José María di Paola, well-known in Buenos Aires as "Padre Pepe"

Hermida said. "When there's an emergency, they knock on their neighbor's door, whereas in Buenos Aires, we tend to live anonymously in our apartments without knowing about our neighbor's life. The slums are much more of a community."

Hermida, who spent much of his life living in the country's interior, said it used to be common for kids to get together, no matter their social class, and play soccer in their neighborhood. Those customs are lost throughout most of the country, he said, except in *las villas*, where neighborly relationships still thrive.

"I think it's valuable for family life;

it unites families," he said. "It seems to me that families who live in Buenos Aires are more consumed by their own problems, and we allow our families to take a backseat. By focusing on our daily worries, we end up creating a distance."

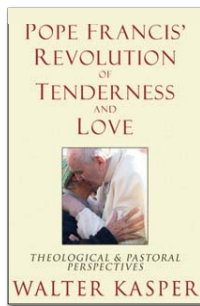
A typical mother from the slums, Hermida said, is essentially the family's lioness, protective and worrying about her cubs getting involved in the barrio's frequent dangers.

"They don't abandon them even when they're in jail, because they're hoping to successfully reintegrate their kid afterward. She's like the lioness in that she's always there — like

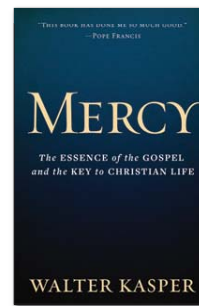


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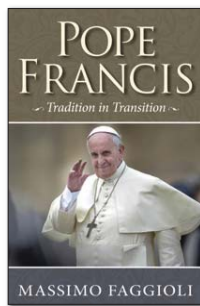
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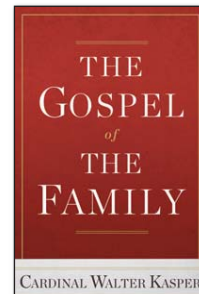
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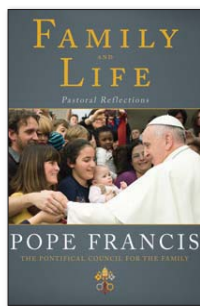
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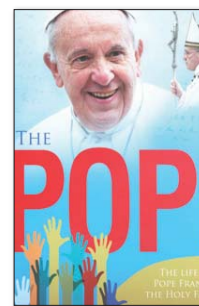
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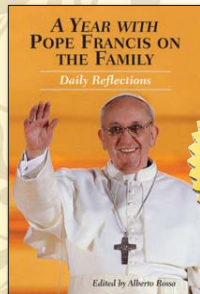
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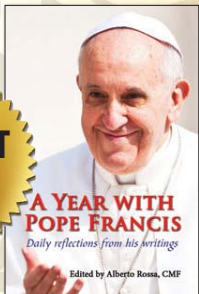
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most mothers, sure, but it's particularly special in the slums, when you think of all their shortcomings. They don't have access to a lawyer, or they might not have a job. And that makes it far more difficult to help their kids."

## The drug scene

In 2001, Argentina experienced an economic crisis that led to a 50 percent population increase throughout the capital's shantytowns the following 10 years. Trailing that boom was the budding drug scene, eventually consuming life in these fringe communities.

It seemed that drugs would be an obvious response when asked about the biggest risks facing slum families, but Fr. Lorenzo "Toto" de Vedia was apprehensive about emphasizing the dangers of *las villas*.

"For me to start off by talking about my worries doesn't totally coincide with my actual perception of this place," said de Vedia, who replaced Padre Pepe as chief pastor of the Virgin of Caacupé Parish in 2012. "For me, *la villa* is a place radiating with life, and a place with a lot of values that aren't often recognized by people on the outside."

"With that said, I do have a lot of worries, the principal one being the sense of exclusion and marginalization, which manifests itself in a variety of ways," he said.

"And drugs, particularly *paco*, is one of those manifestations."

*Paco* — a toxic combination of crack cocaine residue, baking soda, and sometimes glass and rat poison —



—Horacio "Tati" di Renzi

At the Virgin de Caacupé Parish, a local man from Villa 21 lights a candle at a makeshift altar dedicated to youths who have died from violence.

stormed the streets in 2001 amid the financial crisis. It is cheap and highly addictive, making it a favorite street drug among the country's poorest, with reports showing children as young as 9 getting hooked. Though drug popularity depends on the slum — in others it might be cocaine, or mixing pills with alcohol — the drugs with the lowest quality end up in the poorest neighborhoods, Padre Pepe said.

The priest has taken a highly public stance against the drug trade. In 2009, he invited media into the shantytowns

to explore the *paco* epidemic. Putting such a spotlight on the narcotic scene eventually sparked serious death threats against Padre Pepe, and Bergoglio, then archbishop, relocated Padre Pepe to his current slum, La Cárcova in León Suárez outside Buenos Aires.

"Pepe saw that drugs were a free-for-all and that too many kids were getting involved," said Juan Ramón Congo, a resident in Villa 21 who had a close relationship with both Padre Pepe and Bergoglio. "The parishes were always the only ones organized enough to address the issue, and with him being head of the priests and garnering such support, he became their target."

When Padre Pepe notified Bergoglio of the threats, he responded, "I would rather them kill me than any of you" — a testament to the paternal relationship between the archbishop and his slum priests. The community, joined by Bergoglio, reacted with an organized march, demonstrating their unwavering support for Padre Pepe's cause.

"One is in constant contact with families whose kids are addicts," Padre Pepe said. "And it's a problem that affects not just the one who's addicted, but also the mother and the father, who constantly ask themselves, 'Where did I mess up?' or 'What did I do wrong?' or 'Why did I let him hang out with so-and-so?'"

A common misconception, he said, is that drugs only affect floundering families; in reality, he knows many solid families where, "through just a tiny crack, drugs seeped in." A sense

of exclusion, de Vedia said, is typically that tiny crack that makes it easier for drugs to find the vulnerable.

"And those who profit from the drugs aren't the residents, but those who build their empires from the outside and take advantage of the conditions here that make this a favorable market for them," de Vedia said.

Padre Pepe added that drug traffickers use drugs for currency, increasing its consumption: Policemen and dealers alike are paid in drugs, which allows drugs to "branch out further with every trade, and unravel the social fabric of the neighborhood."

The lack of government intervention only furthers the problem, Hermida said, as political leaders rarely get involved with issues that directly affect *villas*.

In Rosario, a city in the central province of Santa Fe where Hermida's university group also volunteers, one walks through the neighborhoods and "literally sees the bunkers, where the illegal activity going on is well-known, and yet they are fully enabled to operate."

"In reality, they should be bulldozed and wiped out," Hermida said. "But the government doesn't do that, because one way or another, it serves them to have them there. There's major corruption with our Argentine political leaders — and our country in general, because you can't just blame the politicians. Citizens should be demanding more from their leaders. We voted for them. We are responsible. We are all parents. We need to work with

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## Friends of NCR 2015-16 Annual Appeal

Dear NCR Readers,

Here at NCR, we've spent the past year celebrating our first 50 years in publication. For me, it has been deeply humbling and gratifying to hear from so many of you about the impact NCR has had on your faith and your life.

As we embark on our next 50 years, I want you, our readers, to know how much you mean to NCR. You are the lifeblood that keeps us going through your loyal readership, heartfelt engagement and financial support. That's why you make NCR what it is, a family of readers and supporters who value independent reporting, insightful analyses and spiritual reflections.

To honor the NCR family, this year we have chosen the theme "One Family United in Faith and Hope" for our annual appeal. Soon you will be receiving your appeal letter in the mail, and I encourage you to read it and take action by making a donation. NCR would not be where it is today without the generous gifts from our donor family, gifts that sustain our mission and enable us to provide the comprehensive coverage our readers have come to expect.

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## BUENOS AIRES: KIDS AND BRUTAL REALITIES

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each other to create new horizons and reexamine where our priorities lie.”

Sheltering children from the neighborhood’s brutal realities is a challenge, said Juana Cabral, a resident of Villa 21 who has two young daughters, both always asking about their surroundings: “What’s that smell? What are they smoking? Why are they acting like that?”

“This is our day-to-day life, so you try to move forward and not focus on the ugly, instead thinking about the positive, especially when you have kids,” said Cabral, who also had a close relationship with Bergoglio and Padre Pepe. “You see a lot of things you hope they don’t notice, but they’re curious.”

The neighborhood has volunteers who try to keep the kids occupied, so as to prevent too much free time, when their questions could lead to answers gained by experience. School on weekdays, catechesis on Saturdays, and activities — such as sports or arts and crafts — all day Sunday make up their regular week. (The parish’s cricket team, Cabral and Congo proudly mention, won the South American championship).

Another Villa 21 priest, Fr. Charly Olivero — who Congo said is “the best in this field” — hosts recovery groups, and hired social workers and cooks to tend to more than 100 addicts a day.

Virgin of Caacupé Parish sponsors rehabilitation farms where addicts go and do manual labor, recovering far from temptation. Bergoglio, Congo said, heavily supported all campaigns geared toward addicts, and would come to their church meetings and sometimes wash their feet.

But Congo said that, in terms of direct confrontation regarding addiction, Bergoglio would more often approach the priests, offering both financial and spiritual support. Congo said nearly 150 kids in the neighborhood have been involved in those recovery groups. During the many retreats the parish sponsored for recovering addicts, Bergoglio would go, sitting and chatting with the

kids, Congo said. As archbishop, Bergoglio also opened trade schools so that adolescents could discover hobbies and passions to fill any void.

“He would accept them how they were, but he would always remind them that there was a path to change,” Congo said. “Addiction is a tricky subject, because they need to be the ones who help themselves, without force. But he always offered spiritual support; he wouldn’t challenge them and then just let them be.”

### Misconceptions

Violence, delinquency and the burgeoning drug scene predictably steal local headlines and become regular subjects of Argentine blockbusters, thus forming an outsider’s perception of “typical life” in these slums.

“Many of the people who work here — take maids, for example — usually can’t admit where they live,” Congo said. “They’ll get rejected. Why? Because ‘everyone from *las villas* is the same.’”

“That’s happened to me,” Cabral added.

The majority of people, they said, are Monday-through-Friday workers who spend free time at their parishes, or are college students and seminarians trying to make it out of the neighborhood.

“It’s not like what most people think — that the slums are all delinquents and narcotics,” Congo said. “That’s here, sure, but you can find that in any neighborhood. People forget about the hard workers. Unfortunately, when crime occurs in our *villa*, people write it off as, ‘Oh it’s the people from the slums,’ even if it was just one person.”

Though these stereotypes challenge job prospects, Cabral said that, more damagingly, these misconceptions are a blow to their pride.

“It’s rough when the kids are ashamed to say where they’re from, because if they say *la villa*, they feel like the other kids look at them differently,” Cabral said. “I’ve had to deny where I’m from as I looked for work, and it’s painful because you should be proud of where you’re from.”



Juana Cabral and daughter María José — named after Padre Pepe (Fr. José María di Paola) — at their home in Villa 21, where on Sept. 5 they shared stories and photos of their archbishop-turned-pope

—Horacio “Tati” di Renzi

But having a bishop who’s always around and levels himself with those who feel discarded by society served as a constant reminder that there’s dignity in leading a modest lifestyle.

“Day by day, we learn to hold our heads high; I used to hang my head low,” she said. “And it’s not just because he’s the pope, so much, because even before that, we learned to look at life this way, but thanks to him.”

### Francis’ relationships

Upon his election, Francis’ humility was an immediate and pleasant surprise to the world that didn’t know anything about its first Latino pope. But to those in Villa 21, his words and actions were more of the same old Bergoglio.

Hopping off the bus, Bergoglio

would often show up and casually celebrate Mass unannounced, rather than have the usual spectacle that follows bishops into local parishes. His homilies would emphasize that though there are a lot of rich people in the world, it’s mere material wealth. Here, he would tell the congregation, are the people who are rich within.

“We asked him why he would share the table with us, or why he didn’t act like other bishops, and he always said that what interested him was our spiritual wealth,” Cabral said. “We never saw him as a *señor* — he was a friend here.”

Congo, Cabral and Padre Pepe said that Bergoglio was basically just another priest in the slums because he was so present, never missing a big feast or daylong confirmations. Everyone

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## 12 WORLD

**BUENOS AIRES: SAME OLD BERGOGLIO**

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felt like they could approach him with their problems without him ever seeming too busy, and they could stop him on the street and ask for a quick blessing.

Bergoglio being so approachable, Cabral said, made the other priests more approachable, as they would see him walk alongside the parishioners and then do it more themselves.

She said it was typical of Bergoglio to randomly knock on their doors and ask to join for coffee or mate — an Argentine tea. “We would always talk about whatever we felt like talking about, because he allowed that kind of conversation,” she said. And those who knew him well might not even realize he had been at a Mass the whole time, sitting in the back corner with his briefcase on his lap, observing everything.

“The difference between him and other bishops was that he was involved in *las villas* — not just one who sent priests, but one that would go himself,” Padre Pepe said. “He would substitute for priests. You got sick, you’d call him, and he’d celebrate the Mass, anytime you needed him.”

Just as dutifully as he would show up for special Masses, Bergoglio would attend retreats or group gatherings and give 40-minute lectures, no matter how many attended.

When asked how Francis could serve as an example to other priests and bishops, Cabral and Congo were emphatic in their response: by his participation. Families going through incredibly rough times, they said, would go on long walks with Bergoglio just to talk, weaving through the grungy narrow alleyways — never mind the rain or mud.

“When I picture him, it’s not as the pope,” she said. “It’s in his black suit and briefcase in hand — which he took everywhere with him — on the bus coming here or on the subway heading to the cathedral.”

A popular photo of Bergoglio for those who live in Villa 21 is of him in his black garments, eating a *choripán* — a traditional chorizo sandwich.

“Everyone has a picture of him from that day,” Congo said. “Because even though he was the archbishop, it was clear that he didn’t need a special meal — he could just share *choripanes* with us. Anything we ate, he ate. His humility and simplicity was very clear to the people.”

As pope, Francis’ outreach to other religions and nonjudgmental phrases garnered further international attention while raising delighted eyebrows across pews — except for those in Villa 21. Their former archbishop had great relationships with Muslims and Jewish alike, Congo said, a trait that was highlighted when he participated in a large get-together attended by a number of religions.

A photo of Bergoglio hugging a non-Catholic Christian gained the community’s attention, particularly the story behind it: Bergoglio said to the crowd, grab the person next to you, and ask them to pray for you. He turned to the non-Catholic and said, “Pray for me.”

“He still says that — ‘Pray for me,’ ” Congo said. “He could’ve tried to convert that person in some way, or seek to baptize him. But no — he asked that he pray for him.”

The former archbishop once known for never smiling is, to those from the *villa*, the same man he’s always been. Visibility requires change, Congo said

in reference to the now cheerful pope, but those who know him well have not been surprised by his papacy yet.

He was a very good friend to all the priests, Cabral added, “and we’re lucky for that.”

“I’ve known him for a very long time and began my work in *las villas* when

**Trade schools**

One of Bergoglio’s legacies began in 2010, when he and Msgr. Victor Fernández, rector of the Catholic University of Argentina, began the initiative Social Compromise and Extension, where hundreds of college students get

with certain suffering,” Hermida said.

While the initiative’s primary aim is to broaden the students’ understanding of harsh realities in the slums, as well as to humanize poverty, Hermida said one of the most eye-opening observations the group walks away with is noticing how people in the slums don’t focus on petty worries.

“They live their life day-to-day with contentment, without our kind of concerns. I see that as a virtue. We stress out about things that keep us from looking around, or from having two-minute conversations. There’s a fault in being so rushed that you’re unable to see the real issues.”

Those in the slums, however, are inclined to look at these academic outsiders with suspicion, a challenge that Hermida said he embraces, believing it is an opportunity for society to act on the obligation of reaching out to those on the peripheries.

**‘We asked him ... why he didn’t act like other bishops, and he always said that what interested him was our spiritual wealth.’**

—Juana Cabral

he was archbishop, our relationship getting even stronger throughout my time at Villa 21,” Padre Pepe said. “He very much liked the work we did for kids and adolescents regarding [drug] prevention and recovery, or our missions and spiritual groups. More than anything, he loved our missionary work — a love we very much shared.

involved in social issues affecting *las villas*. Both students and professors’ work includes such activities as teaching health courses, offering therapy, hosting educational day care, and giving entrepreneurial workshops.

“The focus was for the students to leave the university’s four walls and get away from their desks to get face-to-face



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—Horacio “Tati” di Renzi

Residents of Villa 21 share *choripanes*, a traditional chorizo sandwich, following a Mass Sept. 5.

Those in academia have a strong social debt to repay, Hermida said, because the privileged tend to stereotype this other world, unaware that they're selective about whom they consider robbers or murderers. Hermida pointed at the country's politicians who steal from its citizens, yet never face consequences.

“Just imagine how when a young boy goes out and steals, it could be what ultimately destroys his family. When drugs begin to run through the streets, a family might be unable to turn in the dealers because one of their kids could get killed — and you see how complicated it all is. These are

the points that we need to recognize as a society, and not just by visiting shantytowns, but also by lowering our accusing fingers that create the ‘them-us, us-them’ dichotomy.”

About 10 years ago, Bergoglio, with Padre Pepe, opened multiple *casas de oficio* — or trade schools — for those 13 years and older, where they are introduced to both practical and creative skills, such as ceramics, computers, baking or mechanics.

Padre Pepe is working toward implementing this project at his current *villa*. He said the goal is so that even the child of a carton-picker — those who collect and repurpose cardboard they

find on the streets — can still grow up with useful skills.

“That’s just as important as starting prayer groups,” he said. “It’s the kind of work where the social and religious meet. There’s no need to announce, ‘Now we’ll begin our hour of prayer, followed by an hour of activity.’ No one notices a difference. You can be cooking in the dining room and then go straight to Mass, and to them, it’s all the same.”

### Post-Francis

Just four months before Bergoglio’s ascent to the papacy, Villa 21 had already lost their friend and pastor Padre Pepe through his reassignment. One was missed for being on the other side of town yet cautioned not to visit. The other, however, was celebrated as the 266th pope, now with a new identity: from Padre Jorge to *el Papa Francisco*.

The neighborhood wept and cheered, watching on television as their former archbishop emerged on the balcony, Cabral said. The streets resembled a World Cup victory.

After Francis became pope, worldwide curiosity began to spread regarding his previous life in *las villas*. Even President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner — a firm public adversary of Bergoglio’s throughout his career in Buenos Aires — had previously never visited a *villa* in her four years as first lady and six years as president. Since his election, she’s made several appearances, and even chose a prominent national celebration to be held at Virgin of Caacupé Parish.

“We used to be unknown, and now there’s all this attention,” Congo said. “Many people started to check out this neighborhood, and they couldn’t believe that he’d walk around here by himself, through the alleyways.”

Just as Bergoglio’s humility as bishop inspired a sense of dignity among the residents, so did the reactions from inquiring reporters who came from across the world to shed light on his background.

The influx of outsiders intimidated the children, who anticipated discrimination, Cabral said. But instead they grew proud, as lines formed of people wanting to hear stories about the new pope.

“It was emotional, because you could see them not feel like they were lesser than other people,” she said.

Parish life in Villa 21 blossomed as well, as attendance for both spiritual groups and retreats grew. Everyone was curious to learn what Francis had to say when he was here, Congo said.

Padre Pepe, however, said that priests and missionaries should be careful not to rely on Francis to do all the work. There was a sudden and powerful spiritual whirl that came with this excitement, he acknowledged, and local churches are benefitting from it. But he said that this still shouldn’t change what he’s always preached: Change comes from the bottom up.

“If Argentines don’t seize this moment, it is because we are the biggest fools in the world for wasting this spiritual awakening he brought to our

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# Welcome to our Holy Father, Pope Francis!

United States Province  
Holyoke MA



## BUENOS AIRES: VITAL FOR CHURCH LIFE

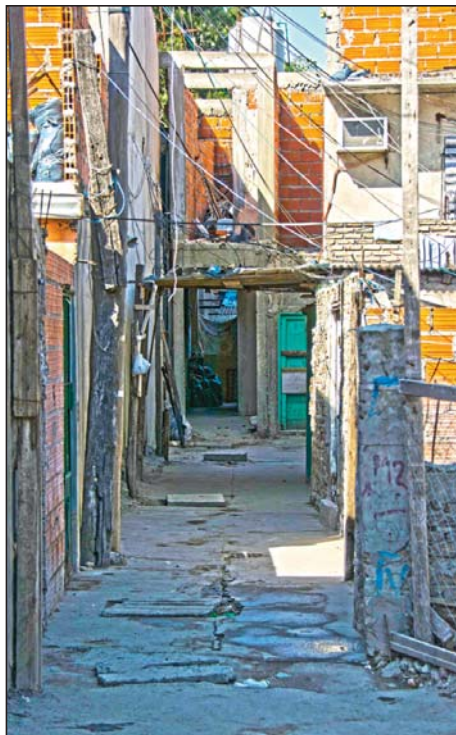
Continued from Page 13

churches. But if we do not change from the bottom, we will not change anything," he said. "People always want magic. They think, 'If the pope does this, then people will come closer to the church.' But people will approach the church when the parish doors are open, when we provoke action from inside the neighborhoods — be it in the slums or not."

### Call for change

When Bergoglio named Padre Pepe pastor of the Virgin of Caacupé Parish in 1997, the priest thought to appeal to his Paraguayan base by incorporating a replica of the Virgin of Caacupé, whom Paraguayans revere. At the cathedral, Bergoglio celebrated a Mass welcoming the arrival of this new statue to *la villa*. After Mass, the crowds exited the church in a huge procession, trailed by their archbishop — a sight his Paraguayan friends hold on to fondly, Congo said.

"The Virgin was like an umbrella for Paraguayans, bringing them together," Padre Pepe said, recalling that ceremony. "But in this *villa* [La Cárcova], there's not really an element like that, so you have to find a way to unite them. People are coming to the church, but there was a lot of abandonment, and now they're missing a Catholic formation."



—Horacio "Tati" di Renzi  
A typical street in Villa 21 shows stacks of homes squeezed into close quarters.

Though there are many practicing Catholics where he works now, there are many who left the church and need to be sought out, but carefully. If you forsake people for a long time, he said, then you can't expect them to attend Mass or offer a confession overnight.

To carry out the level of outreach he thinks is necessary, Padre Pepe said, "we must become aware about the need to change many things in the church — which is not the same thing

as starting a revolution."

Going from a pyramidal church to a horizontal one, he said, is a crucial change.

When he was pastor at Santiago del Estero in Buenos Aires, he saw that the people were uneasy about having lay lectors and eucharistic ministers. But overseeing 16 chapels, all 30 miles apart from each other, made it impossible for Padre Pepe to preside over the Masses himself. With a more horizontal structure, Padre Pepe said, people could learn to feel more comfortable about one parishioner opening the chapel doors, another doing the reading, and another sharing the Eucharist — the pastor being the organizer.

Padre Pepe oversees nine chapels — none of which were open as he was being interviewed, he said, because parishioners tell themselves, "If Padre Pepe isn't here, we can't go." The diocese must ensure that the chapels are always open, with parishioners working with their pastor on adopting a new structure, he said, adding that laypeople would have special training before assuming such tasks. This, he said, would be vital for church life to flourish.

"It is fundamental that the bishops not take any longer to realize this. This isn't an ideological shift. ... We need to reform our ecclesiastical structure, no doubt; it's a methodological change, or ideological only in the sense that the priest is no longer the one who solves everything in the chapel or beholds all the wisdom."

Stronger sacramental outreach, Padre Pepe said, is also imperative for wel-

coming back those who once strayed. People in the slums, for example, usually don't marry and instead remain as couples raising a family — a fact Padre Pepe said is the church's fault for sending unclear messages.

"Sometimes what holds us back are inutile practices, like denying Communion to the unmarried. And, honestly, that is living in another time, because we are excluding a ton of people who need to receive the Eucharist to truly feel like a part of the church. We must remember that these are people who typically never had catechesis — not the people who were fully formed by their parish. Most people don't have that education, so unfortunately, we are making demands that cannot be met."

Though marriages are declining, Padre Pepe noted that baptisms remain as steady as ever, a fact made clear at that day's 11 a.m. Mass, book-ended by baptisms at the chapel of Our Lady of the Miracle.

As the congregation sang the closing song, "*Alma Misionera*" ("Missionary Soul") the lyrics that concluded the Mass echoed Francis' repeated calls to reach the peripheries, the marginalized, the forgotten:

Take me where man needs  
your word, where they need  
your will to live;  
Where there is no hope, where  
there is no joy, simply for not  
knowing you.

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