# Pope Leo XIV in Argentina: A sign of faith and Community for Lasallians

From the moment Pope Leo XIV's apostolic journey to Argentina — from 8 to 11 November — was announced, as part of his first pastoral visit to Latin America — from 6 to 17 November — which also included Uruguay and Peru, **the Lasallians of the Argentina-Paraguay District began to organise themselves to experience the meeting with the Pontiff** as an occasion for faith, community and evangelisation.



"Brothers, teachers, families, students, alumni – we have all come together for this huge gathering in the country. We, the Lasallian men and women, are also here to support this sign of faith," commented Brother Alejandro Bruni, head of the District's Formation Commission. It has also been **"a sign of community, a sign of evangelisation and of peace for all our people**,**"** added Brother Alejandro, who is also the Director of Colegio La Salle González Catán.

"When we learnt that Pope Leo XIV was going to visit us in Argentina, as a network we decided to organise this together," explained María Victoria Cisneros, who was part of the organising team. "We came together for a preliminary gathering, a vigil where, together with students and teachers, we shared **a profound experience of fraternity and prepared ourselves to come together with the Church, the People of God**."

## Gatherings in Buenos Aires, Córdoba and Luján



Similarly, Leandro Giordano, head of the pastoral and catechesis team, explains that **“as a District, we have been present at three locations where Leo XIV has led various events”. Thus, the Lasallians took part in the gatherings in Buenos Aires, Córdoba and Luján**. Earlier, as part of the preparation process, “we met via Meet to learn more about the history of [Robert] Prevost, and to explore amongst ourselves who Leo XIV is, what his words are, and what challenges he presents”, adds Leandro. Similarly, “we took part in some group activities to get to know one another better, working through all the themes put forward by the Pope and De La Salle”, as Vera Figueroa, a student at Colegio La Salle Florida, explains.

In the end, “we kept meeting up throughout the three days of Pope Leo’s visit, and particularly at the Mass at the *Monumento de los Españoles*. **There were 130 of us – around 120 students**, perhaps a few more,” says María Eva Gegenschatz, from the organising team, whilst emphasising the importance of “preparing our hearts, not just to go and see the Pope, but to share in the Mass and the journey, as well as the pilgrimage towards a deeper connection with the Church, whilst also understanding that we are part of something greater”.



Looking back, Brother Ulises Vera, the District’s bursar, emphasises that “we feel that the presence of Leo XIV has been a blessing, a source of renewed enthusiasm and a desire to talk with others”, and this also leads us to ask ourselves: who is Jesus for me? What does this experience of faith mean? The Pope has also left a key message, as Brother Ulises remarked: “Drawing close to Jesus and being in communion with him means building community. And **what could be more Lasallian than building community? We are happy and eager to continue building community**.”

# Breaking down the barriers of selfishness

In addition to the meetings and celebrations in which Lasallians took part, one of the highlights of Pope Leo XIV's trip to Argentina was his visit to the 'Pequeño Cottolengo Don Orione de Claypole', "a fraternal community with open doors, where everything speaks to us of God's love", as the Bishop of Rome himself put it.



Visibly moved by the testimonies he heard from Marta and Norma, two beneficiaries of this charitable organisation founded by Saint Luigi Orione to welcome society's most vulnerable members—who were often ignored and left to fend for themselves—the Pope encouraged everyone **to place "the gifts we have received at the service of the least among us and those in need**, each according to their own means, so that 'the city of charity' may be strengthened, spread and succeed in breaking down the barriers of selfishness".

## La Salle and the 'Pequeño Cottolengo Don Orione de Claypole'

Similarly, during his visit, Leo XIV emphasised the commitment to the most vulnerable: "I imagine thousands of young people joining as volunteers in the great history of charity that the sincere and simple faith of the Argentine people has written over the centuries," he said.



For the Lasallians of Argentina, the challenge of being 'leaven on the peripheries' has been present since their very beginnings. Indeed, **in the 1940s, the Brothers took over an agricultural boarding school in the town of Claypole, linked to the *Patronato de la Infancia* (PADELAI)**. "This educational institution accommodated 350 students aged between 12 and 18, and was funded by state grants and contributions from the Patronato," recalls Brother Santiago Rodríguez Mancini in an article published in issue No. 07 of the *bulletin Asociados*".

Thus, in those years, La Salle contributed in Claypole to the education and support of “abandoned children, particularly the many street children who roamed the town at that time”.

More recently, some De La Salle Brothers have spent part of their holidays with the vulnerable residents of the ‘Pequeño Cottolengo Don Orione of Claypole’, as Brother Nicolás Chamorro, Visitor of the Argentina-Paraguay District recalls: “We had created a space we called the ‘Youth Generational Group’, where we dreamt and prepared for the future based on a preferential option for the poorest.” “On one occasion, we went to live inside the Don Orione Cottolengo for a week. There **we assisted the men with their personal hygiene and care, as these are people who face great difficulties and are unable to move**; so we also supported them in their religious and spiritual formation, taking them to Mass, to the theatre and to recreational activities.”

“It was a truly beautiful experience that enabled us to understand a different kind of fragility, which enriched our mission as educators… an experience of reaching our limits that led us to rebuild ourselves from scratch,” continues Brother Nicolás, emphasising that **“the Cotolengo is a radical experience, a very radical one – one of the most radical I have ever experienced**”.

Brother Alejandro Bruni has also had the opportunity to live through this experience on two occasions: “The first was a few years ago with a group of young Brothers and postulants, and the second was on a more personal level, alongside young people from the vocations ministry and also accompanied by Brothers and postulants.”

“The tasks we carry out involve providing care and companionship to the residents at the Cottolengo.” This encompasses “everything from personal hygiene to feeding them, accompanying them to Mass, and tasks such as cleaning, improving the grounds, and organising recreational activities”. **“The key is to be with them, to share through our presence, closeness and acceptance**,**”** highlights Brother Alejandro.

“For those of us who are not used to working so frequently with people who have intellectual disabilities — to the extent experienced by the residents of the Cottolengo — as well as physical disabilities, **it is an experience that makes a deep impression, but, above all, it teaches us about connection and**

**closeness**, **and helps to break down barriers so that we can develop a loving outlook**," he concludes.

***We invite you to watch the edition of LaSalleOrg News dedicated to the experience of the Lasallians in Argentina during Pope Leo XIV's visit:***

*To find out more about "La Salle in Argentina and the Patronato de la Infancia in the 1940s", we invite you to read the article available **HERE** in the bulletin Asociados No. 7 (pp. 27–32).*

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