News
Ministry



Pope Francis meets migrants during his visit to the Mavrovouni camp for refugees and migrants on the island of Lesbos, Greece, Dec. 5, 2021. (CNS/Reuters/Guglielmo Mangiapane)



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Sisters from around the world who work with the poor in their ministries lined the pope's funeral route, from St. Peter's Square to the Basilica of St. Mary Maggiore and points between, to say goodbye, not just to Pope Francis but what he represented.

And if it were up to them, they would vote for a pope who will continue Francis' fierce defense of the most vulnerable, some sisters said, as global migration and poverty rates rise.

Mercy Sr. Mary Scullion, co-founder of Project HOME, which provides support and services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness in the Philadelphia area, met the Holy Father during his 2015 visit to the United States.

"It was very emotional to say goodbye to such an inspirational and transformative spiritual leader," Scullion told Global Sisters Report a couple days after attending the pope's funeral at St. Peter's Square.

His "revolution of tenderness" based in solidarity with the suffering, those experiencing poverty, and those on the margins, undertaken in a spirit of humility, is critically needed at this moment in history, Scullion said.





Left: Divine Love Oblate Sr. Jennifer Padilla Núñez holds a flag of her native Costa Rica outside the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome April 26, 2025, just before Pope Francis' entombment (GSR photo/Rhina Guidos). Right: Mercy Sr. Mary Scullion of Philadelphia poses for a photo before the funeral Mass of Pope Francis at St. Peter's Square in Vatican City April 26, 2025 (Courtesy of Mary Scullion).

> 'More than a good pope, we lost a pope who was just. That's what we want for our people, for our world. A pope who is close.'
>
> —Divine Love Oblate Sr. Jennifer Padilla Núñez
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The COVID-19 pandemic dealt a blow to anti-poverty efforts around the world, as poverty increased in 2020 from 8.9% to 9.7% that year, a rise that hadn't been seen

in decades, according to the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Likewise, the department says that in 2024 the global number of international migrants rose to 304 million, nearly double the number of migrants in 1990. The United States under President Donald Trump has scaled back humanitarian aid at home and abroad and cracked down on migrants.

At the end of Francis' life, many felt he was the last world leader defending them.

"More than a good pope, we lost a pope who was just," said Divine Love Oblate Sr. Jennifer Padilla Núñez. "That's what we want for our people, for our world. A pope who is close."

Though her congregation doesn't specifically minister to migrants, it does serve pilgrims in Rome, where sisters see some of the difficulties migrants to the country face, said Padilla, who is from Costa Rica.

"We see a lot of migrants. ... From that point of view, we do feel that compassion and we are like them, we feel what it's like to be them," she said.

Francis expressed closeness to them, and with his actions gave migrants priority, she said. One of his first visits early in his pontificate was to a community of Latin American immigrants living in the Roman suburb of Pietralata, where he talked and prayed with them.

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Padilla said the best way to honor him is to keep doing what he did with migrants, which is to make them feel welcome.

Sr. Norma Heredia, of the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Good and Perpetual Help in Argentina, said he always had special gestures for the poor but also with sisters. She said she maintained a relationship with him via letters. He always responded. The last thing he did was sign a cross she received on the occasion of her first vows.

"They were simple things he did for us, but for us, they were big," she said.

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Sisters said they hope the next pontiff will have the same kind attention with the poor and migrants.

"His compassion and humanity has touched our lives and hearts deeply," Scullion said. "His voice to act with mercy and seek justice stood out so powerfully in today's world. We can only hope and pray that the next pope will build on this profound legacy."

In a May 1 post, Sr. Lucia Caram, who had interactions with Pope Francis as she became involved with getting material help for Ukraine, said she felt a profound emptiness and already misses Francis.

"But I also feel an immense strength to carry on your legacy," Caram wrote to Francis on Instagram. "You confirmed my faith and my mission. Thank you for so many things. I will continue walking with your voice in my heart."

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This story appears in the **The Legacy of Pope Francis**, **Who will be the next pope?**, and **Pope Leo XIV** feature series.