



Singers Reflect on Meeting Pope Francis at the 2015 Rome Congress



Lily Muzzy, 10, St. Edward the Confessor Parish School Choir, Dana Point, CA

Our day started early, we had to be on the bus and ready to rehearse. When we got to the Vatican there were long security lines and we waited anxiously to enter the hall and for our chance to see Pope Francis. Once in the Audience Hall, we began practicing our music and slowly more and more singers arrived. As we waited, the rehearsal grew in size and volume. Finally, an announcement was made and each nation's representatives were called to the front of the hall where we waited for Pope Francis to arrive. I had the opportunity be an ambassador for the American Federation and I got to meet Mr. Lee Gwozdz, President of the American Federation, and some of the people who had coordinated our visit. It sounded like a rock star had entered the building when Pope Francis came in...slowly he made his way down the center aisle. It seemed to take forever because all along the way he stopped and shook hands with members of the Congress. People waved

flags and chanted, he smiled and greeted all who stood along the center aisle. As we looked back you could see children standing on seats, crowding in, and piling up just to get close to him. It was also a sea of selfie sticks because everyone wanted to get his photograph up close. Still we waited, very, very slowly he came to the front, he made his address to the audience and we sang for him.

Afterward, Pope Francis moved along the front row meeting each of the international federation representatives, greeting us and shaking our hands. When he got to me, I held out a small white box that held a white papal zucchetto (the white skull cap) that we had purchased at a store called Gammarelli in Rome. Pope Francis took the new cap, pulled the one that he was wearing off his head and exchanged it for the one I had brought and returned it to the box. Then he placed his hand on my forehead and blessed me. My heart was racing, I found it hard to breathe, I couldn't believe that I was standing face to face with our Holy Father. It was an experience that I will never forget and I have a papal zucchetto and a photo of our exchange to always remember it.

Lily Muzzy



Connor Presley, 16, St. Edward the Confessor Parish School Choir, Dana Point, CA

The Pueri Cantores Rome Congress in winter 2015 was an amazing trip for my entire family, but for me, it was truly a life-changing experience. During this congress, I had the opportunity to participate in events that very few Catholics get to witness. To begin, I had the privilege of serving as a lector during a Mass our diocesan group attended at Basilica Di Santa Maria del Popolo on the day of our arrival in Rome. The very next day, we visited St. Peter's Basilica and entered through the Year of Mercy Holy Doors and learned all about the Vatican. Another unique experience that we enjoyed, and one that I will always personally treasure, was our private tour of the Sistine Chapel and the Vatican Museum. This tour in particular was arranged specially for our group for a time when both places were closed to the general public so we were able to take time to enjoy, reflect, and pray without the chaos and bustle that happens during the day when these sites are open to the public. Some of our other experiences in Italy included visiting Assisi, touring various historical sites in Rome, enjoying some of the best pasta in the world, and singing in St. Peter's Basilica with the Pueri Cantores choir.

However, the most meaningful and impactful part of this trip and something that will remain with me forever, is the day we enjoyed an audience with Pope Francis in Sala Nervi. This was an exclusive privilege for the Pueri Cantores Rome Congress participants from around the world. Prior to making this trip I had been suffering from some health challenges. My mobility was challenging and because I happened to be in a wheelchair on the day of this audience, my mother and I were escorted to the front section of the hall. This special section happened to be in the front row of the audience hall, directly adjacent to the center aisle where the Pope entered the hall. All along the aisle Pope Francis stopped to greet congress participants, shaking hands, waving, and smiling. He took his time and seemed to enjoy each interaction he had. As he approached the front of the hall, I was very surprised because he turned toward me, smiled, approached, and grasped my hand. The power and presence that I felt at that moment and then later as we sang for him and he smiled and encouraged us are almost indescribable. I know that I will cherish this moment of my life forever. This experience has also served as driving force to continue practicing my art, pushing me into the Chamber Choir at JSerra Catholic High School, and serving as the foundation for my renewed love of music and song.

Connor Presley



Robert O'Brien, 10, St. Francis of Assisi Choir, Ann Arbor, MI

Hi! My name is Robert O'Brien and I wanted to tell you what a unique and extraordinary experience it was to meet Pope Francis. This is how it all happened.

Before the Pueri Cantores concert in Rome, people lined up against the barricades just to get a glimpse of him. As he came down the aisle, everyone was yelling, and screaming to him, but what did he do? He came right to ME! It was then I realized this WAS actually happening! He then went to greet many of the teens, kids, and babies.

After the Pueri Cantores concert he came up again to exit and what he did he do? HE SHOOK MY HAND AGAIN! Those moments meant the world to me, and I will never forget them! I had traveled so far for this experience. And now I think of it as a great blessing!!

Robert O'Brien