Vatican



Latam Airlines employees Carlos Ciuffardi Elorriaga, 41, and Paula Podest Ruiz, 39, talk to media after being married by Pope Francis aboard his flight from Santiago, Chile, to Lima, Peru, Jan. 18. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)



by Joshua J. McElwee

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

ABOARD THE PAPAL FLIGHT TO IQUIQUE, CHILE — January 18, 2018

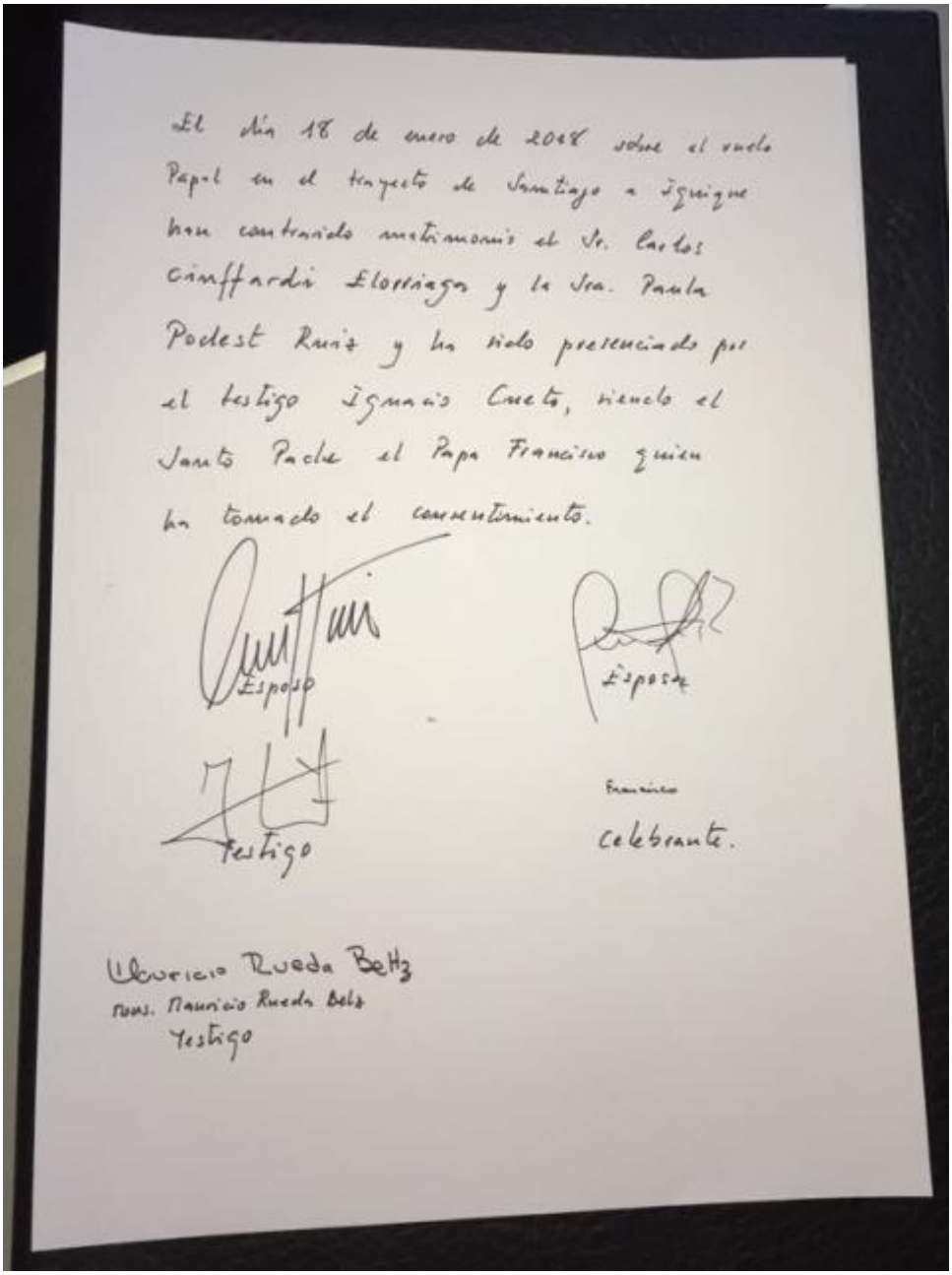
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Pope Francis undertook another surprising first Jan. 18, marrying two flight attendants at 36,000 feet above Chile aboard his flight from Santiago to Iquique during his three-day visit to the country.

Paula Podest Ruiz, 39, and Carlos Ciuffardi Elorriaga, 41, were part of a group of staff that greeted the pontiff during the two-hour LATAM airlines flight. When they asked Francis to bless their relationship, the pope asked if they were married.

Podest and Ciuffardi explained they had been married civilly for eight years, but had yet to have a religious ceremony. The pope suggested they do the ceremony right then and there.

"It was a great surprise and great joy," Vatican spokesman Greg Burke explained aboard the flight afterwards. He then reassured: "Everything's valid, everything's official. There were witnesses, there is a document."


El día 18 de enero de 2018 sobre el vuelo Papal en el trayecto de Santiago a Iquique han contraído matrimonio el Sr. Carlos Ciuffardi Elorriaga y la Sra. Paula Podest Ruiz y ha sido presenciado por el testigo Ignacio Cueto, siendo el Santo Padre el Papa Francisco quien ha tomado el consentimiento.

Esposo

Esposa

Testigo

Francisco
Celebrante.

Mauricio Rueda Behz
Rons. Mauricio Rueda Behz
Testigo

The hand-written document, signed by Pope Francis, attesting to Podest and Ciuffardi's wedding aboard the papal plane (Vatican photo)

In brief comments to reporters as the flight was landing, Ciuffardi said the pope asked he and Podest: "Are you married?" When they explained they were married civilly but not religiously, the pontiff asked: "Well, do you want to get married?"

The couple responded: "Well, yes, but are you sure?" To which Francis asked: "Are you sure?"

Podest told journalists she and Ciuffardi had planned to be married in a religious ceremony at their parish in 2010, but that the building had been damaged by an earthquake and they just had not scheduled another ceremony.

The couple said they have two children: Rafaella, 6, and Isabella, 3.

While the pope normally flies Alitalia on the first leg of his foreign trips, he usually flies one of the carriers of the nation he is visiting for flights inside the country.



Pope Francis presides at the wedding ceremony of Latam Airlines flight attendants Carlos Ciuffardi Elorriaga and Paula Podest Ruiz. (Vatican photo)

The Vatican provided a photo of the handwritten document that attests to the Jan. 18 marriage. It says Ignacio Cueto, the president of LATAM airlines, acted as witness. Above the word "celebrant" is signed in small font "Francisco."

[Joshua J. McElwee is *NCR* Vatican correspondent. His email address is jmcelwee@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter: @joshjmac.]

Advertisement

This story appears in the **Francis in Chile and Peru** feature series. View the full series.