Vatican

View from the Vatican



A new website was launched Feb. 13 where visitors can commit to signing up to offer their prayers on Pope Francis' behalf on March 13, the day of the 10th anniversary of his election as pontiff. (NCR screenshot/Decimus-annus.org)



by Christopher White

Former Vatican Correspondent (2021-2025)

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

Rome — February 16, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

No other phrase has been repeated by Pope Francis more than the seven words he utters at the end of almost every speech he has delivered since his election as pontiff in March 2013.

"*Do not forget to pray for me!*"

When he first appeared on the loggia of St. Peter's Basilica on the night of his election, Francis stunned the world by asking those gathered in the square below to pray for him — an unconventional gesture signaling that something was shifting in this new papacy.

At the end of every Sunday Angelus, before wishing everyone an enjoyable lunch, Francis makes the same request. And even when world leaders come to visit, he often bids them farewell with the same reminder.

Last October, when French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife, Brigitte, visited the pope, he parted ways with his signature sign-off, and the First Lady of France quickly responded: "I pray for you every day."

Now — on the eve of the 10-year anniversary of his election as pontiff — a new initiative is underway asking Catholics around the world to commit to doing just that and making good on the pope's request.

"The Petrine ministry is a grace that God grants to his church, and the 10th anniversary of the pontificate of Pope Francis is an occasion to thank God for the gift

of giving us a pastor," said Msgr. Lucio Ruiz, secretary of the Vatican's Dicastery for Communication. "We must remember that it is a gift."

And the gift that Ruiz, who is spearheading the anniversary initiative, wants Catholics to give in return is an outpouring of prayers — specifically, Hail Marys — next month on the day of the anniversary of his election, March 13.



Msgr. Lucio Ruiz is pictured in a 2009 file photo. (CNS/Paul Haring)

"A significant date like this gives us an opportunity to remember in our hearts what it means to be a church on pilgrimage with Peter, as Jesus wanted," he told me.

Those prayers come at a critical time: In recent months, the successor of Peter has been under attack by those inside the Vatican not aligned with his pastoral priorities. At 86 years old, he struggles with mobility issues, but Francis has dismissed his naysayers and indicated he will press ahead with a full agenda, including presiding over two major summits in Rome in October 2023 and 2024 and pursuing travel plans to far-flung destinations like Mongolia and India.

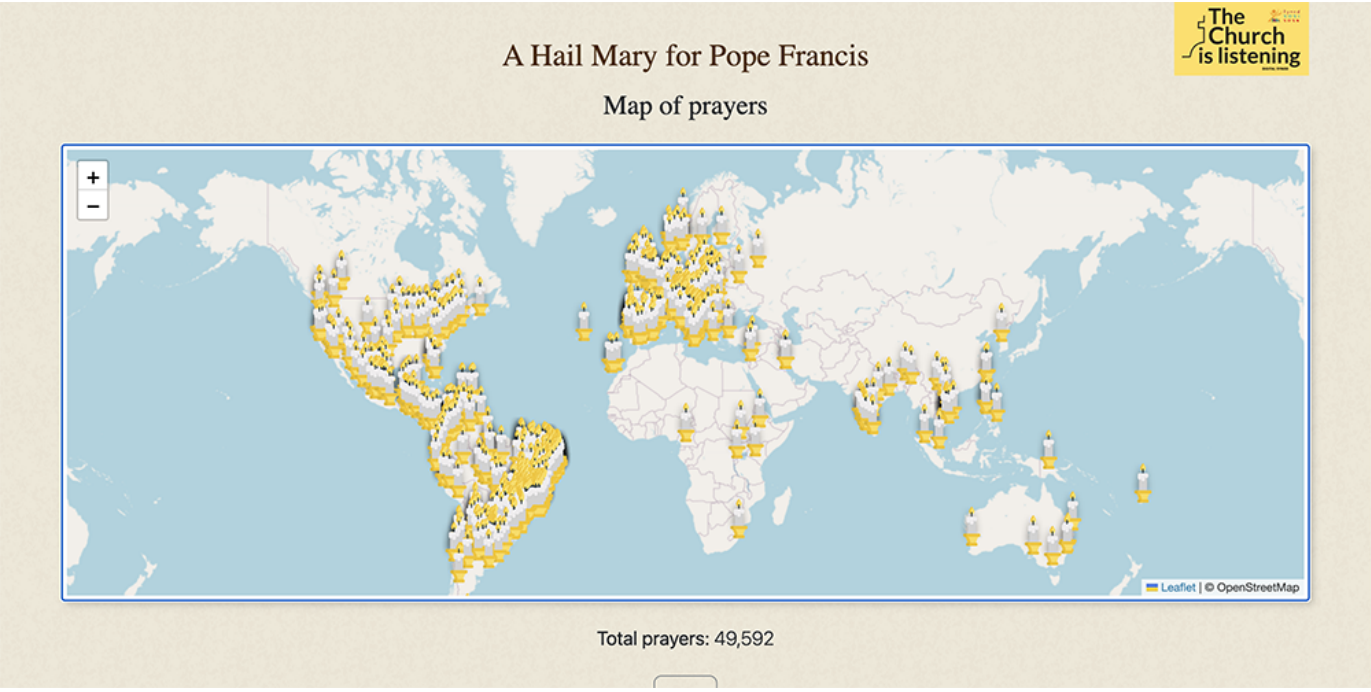
Ruiz, who for over two decades has been working to evangelize in digital environments, both in his native Latin America and in Rome, said the idea for the project came from the "digital missionaries" who took part in the synodal meetings, an effort that sought to hold virtual dialogues during the first phase of the ongoing synod consultation process last fall. At the time, a group of about 250 Catholic digital influencers sent out questionnaires to some 115 countries, resulting in more than 150,000 responses and proposals.

Advertisement

Building on the success of the online community created from the synod, Ruiz's "digital missionaries" began considering how to mark the 10-year anniversary of Francis' election.

"This campaign seeks to respond to this request for prayer made by Pope Francis throughout these 10 years of his pontificate, so that on March 13 we can offer him our prayers for him from different parts of the world, representing the universality of the church, a response that also comes from the digital world," said Ruiz.

On Feb. 13, a new website was launched where in about 10 seconds visitors can commit to signing up to offer their prayers on Pope Francis' behalf on March 13. Upon doing so, a little candle will appear on the virtual map displaying digital solidarity with Pope Francis around the globe.



A new website enables visitors to sign up to offer prayers for Pope Francis on March 13. Upon doing so, a little candle appears on the site's virtual map. As of Feb. 15, more than 45,000 prayers have been committed from every continent (minus Antarctica). (NCR screenshot/Decimus-annus.org)

Despite only being launched less than a week ago, more than 45,000 prayers have been committed from every continent (minus Antarctica). More than 700 digital influencers have been using their networks to promote the campaign and these digital missionaries are looking for more disciples to spread the word.

"It is a symbolic gesture but one that wishes to express the unity of the church around its pastor, with the most important gifts of prayer and unity," said Ruiz, who says that the initiative shows that the church is trying to speak to the language of the culture.

"We know that being at the head of the whole church is a mission that can only be carried out and sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit and with the prayers of all the faithful," he added.

"This awareness of being in need of the support of the prayer of the people of God has always accompanied him throughout his pontificate," Ruiz added — hence the pope's constant plea: "Do not forget to pray for me!"

This story appears in the **10 years with Pope Francis** feature series. View the full series.