

NY Daily News coverage of Pope Francis' visit to East Harlem includes references to LSA Family Health Service and quotes from Sr. Susanne Lachapelle and an LSA family.

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# Huge crowd greeted Pope Francis at East Harlem school, where he offered blessing to immigrants

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A massive crowd of excited kids waving yellow papal flags greeted Pope Francis outside the East Harlem school he visited Friday afternoon.

The exuberant students clamored for the attention of the smiling Pope, who spent seven minutes laughing and touching hands with them as they took endless cell phone pictures.

Accompanied by a bevy of Catholic charity officials and local politicians, the pope entered the school as kids sang "When the Saints Go Marching In," although they changed the words for his final steps to "When the pope goes marching in."

Nearly two dozen schoolkids waited inside to show him their science projects, most of which were about the environment and climate change -- one of several causes dear to Pope Francis.

Many addressed him in his native Spanish, others in English, as he moved through the room, taking time with each student.

He also stopped for a moment to give a blessing to New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, to shake hands with Dante DeBlasio and exchange a few words in Spanish with City Council Speaker Melissa Mark Viverito.

Before he began his prepared remarks, he got a welcome from some soccer team members who put on a brief display for him.

Then a group of immigrant construction workers gifted him with a hard hat.

"We are the workers, we welcome you, we are immigrants, many from your country," said one of the workers in Spanish.

"We are proud to receive you in this moment as your family," he said, to the beaming pontiff.

Among the lucky few able to meet the pope was sister Sister Susanne Lachapelle, a nun who works in East Harlem at a health center run by Little Sisters of the Assumption.

She said his decision to visit the section of Harlem known as "El Barrio" wasn't a coincidence.

Catholic nuns with the Little Sisters of the Assumption branch in Buenos Aires, Argentina, came to stay with Pope Francis' mother when he was born 78 years ago, Lachapelle said.

"He (Pope Francis) never forgot that," Lachapelle said of the sisters who stayed with Francis' mother through childbirth and for two weeks after.

"When (Pope Francis') sister was born, they did the same thing," the nun added.

Lachapelle, who is in regular contact with representatives from the Argentinian branch of LSA, also said that Pope Francis has an LSA crucifix on his bedside table and that he has regularly been celebrating jubilees together with the sisterhood in Buenos Aires.

Lachapelle launched a letter-writing campaign to the Pope when she found out he was coming to New York.

She had children using LSA's services write 295 letters to him asking him to at least pass by the clinic in his motorcade.

"When we found it that he was actually coming here I couldn't believe it. It was like a miracle," Lachapelle said.

Pope Francis, whose progressive views have captured the world's attention, offered a special blessing in East Harlem to refugees and immigrants — including those living here illegally.

It's a message that resonated with Martina Juarez, a Mexican immigrant who lives in El Barrio and has relied on LSA's various services for the past decade.

She and her family were chosen by LSA to meet Pope Francis along with Lachapelle — and they were thrilled they'll be able to speak directly to him in Spanish.

Juarez' daughter, Fabiola Garcia, 12, the only family member who knew English, said they were "amazed" by this whole experience.

"I was watching TV and then my mom got a phone call," said Fabiola, who has attended LSA programs all her life. "I was curious about what the call was about but she wouldn't tell us. She kept writing things down in the calendar."

Fabiola said that her mom didn't tell her that they were going to meet the pope until two days later.

"I was amazed and curious and just kept asking questions," she said.

Thousands of others who hoped for at least a glimpse of Pope Francis were waiting outside Our Lady Queen of Angels School when he exited.

Sofia Ramos, 7, her mother Adriana Vidal and her cousin Abigail Lopez arrived before noon. Sofia wore a shirt with the Pope's picture on it.

It also carried a handwritten message — "I love you" — next to a heart.

She said she wanted to tell the pope he was "a nice man."

Her mother, who has a sister and brother-in-law who were forced to return to Mexico — leaving behind their children — also hoped the pope could do something to help the immigrant community.

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