

Pope shocks Jesuits with unexpected phone call

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Pope Francis
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As the receptionist at Rome's headquarters of the Jesuit order was going about his business Friday, he got an unexpected phone call.

The man on the other end of the line said simply: "This is Pope Francis. May I speak to Fr. General?"

That's former Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, a Jesuit himself and as of Wednesday night the bishop of Rome and global leader of the Roman Catholic church.

In perhaps a bit of fidelity to the priests and brothers he's served amongst since he entered the order's novitiate in 1958, the new pontiff had called down the street from the Vatican to speak to Fr. Adolfo Nicolás Pachón, the order's superior general.

The receptionist was so shocked at the call, according to an email being circulated among the Jesuits, the pope had to continue: "This is not a joke. I am Pope Francis. Who are you?"

After gaining some composure, the secretary forwarded the call to Nicolás' personal secretary.

"I am Pope Francis", said the pontiff again. "May I speak to the General?"

"Holy Father, we are praying much for you," said the secretary, a Jesuit brother.

"Praying for what?" asked the Pope. "To go ahead or to go back?"

"To go ahead", the secretary said, walking into the Nicolás' office with mobile to his ear and still speaking.

According to the email, the superior general was also shocked and so disoriented he switched between calling his confrere "Pope," "Your Holiness," and "Monsignor."

"Thank you for your personal letter to me", the pope said, referencing a letter the Jesuits had sent upon learning of Bergoglio's election to the Roman see.

"I look forward to meeting you", said the General.

"And I you", said the Pope. "We shall meet as soon as we can. I will phone you and we can fix a date."

It's traditional for the heads of religious orders to meet with a new pope in the first few months of his pontificate.

For a flavor of the event, see before for a video interview from CPRO Rome of the Jesuit curia's receptionist.

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