

From my trip to Brazil for World Youth Day, I think the best part, in order of preference, was the pre-WYD mission week in the beautiful region of Minas Gerais where the Assumption has left its own mark, a history one can see in life's day-to-day experiences. During the time we spent in Eugenopolis, Vieras and Queirozes you could feel the kindness of the people toward the Assumption wherever we went…in the welcome we received, the hospitality, the closeness, the simplicity.

In this land known for its coffee and textiles, young people from all over the Assumptionist world had a great time getting to know each other (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, USA, Belgium, France and Ecuador); it was a shame that a last-minute storm prevented the Mexicans from traveling. It was a wonderful cultural interchange rooted in the Assumption spirit. In everything, we felt united by the God of life who brought us together for this gathering. At every moment we tried to get to know each other better– our cultures, our countries. It was amazing to see a common thread, that is, a passion to announce the Kingdom of God.

From the day of our arrival, the people of Eugenopolis didn't stop being attentive to us. Their warmth, their joy were ever present. Of course, I should say a word as well about the extraordinary welcome we received from our fellow Assumptionist brothers who work there.

Each and every moment was special. What I appreciated most was the contact with the people themselves--- living with them, listening to them, sharing their lives, working side by side with them. One day, for example, we visited a local school and I came back rejuvenated as a result of spending time with these little ones, who with their happiness and simplicity revealed the smile of God. This encounter was really edifying; it left me feeling hopeful and happy because I saw in these young people a new world being forged, a world of hope. I also enjoyed meeting their teachers.

But even as we were getting to know the people of this place, among ourselves, Assumption's youth, there were being knotted ties of understanding and friendship. The exchanges bore fruit as we got an idea of each other's countries, their peoples, their music, their dances, their various customs. We took advantage of whatever opportunity we had to grow together and form friendships. Of all these encounters the most meaningful took place in the main square of Eugenopolis, when each country was asked to present a typical dance and all were invited to join in. That was really fun. It was a moment when you could see young people from so many different countries just enjoying themselves, happy to share something of their lives together, something of their own people. Hanging everyone's flag side by side was a sign of a common passion of our working for the coming of the Kingdom wherever each one finds himself in his daily living ---- all these different flags united under one flag, that of the Kingdom.



For me this experience of the Assumptionist-sponsored mission week in Eugenopolis was the highlight of all our experiences in Brazil because there we were able to be with the people, enter their homes, visit their schools, hospitals, and factories, dance with them, eat with them, listen to them , even go horseback riding with them in Vieras. We were also able to have smaller, more intimate celebrations with them wherever we went. This experience gave me a greater

zeal to announce the Kingdom, a greater desire to be with people, to experience how they live. In this way one learns how to live the Gospel more simply and effectively.

During this mission week you could see, in the welcome prepared for us, how much the local Assumptionists wanted to make of this time something really powerful and memorable. Fathers Celio and Marco Aurelio, the two principal leaders, went out of their way to make sure everything went just right, and so it did. I really want to thank God, the Assumptionist communities that we visited, the entire Congregation for this experience. Through it I was able to get to know such a different face of the Assumption, so rich and varied; I was able to sense as an Assumptionist the love for the Kingdom that each of these communities have, a real passion to be with the people, to be signs of the Kingdom. I am so happy and grateful for the opportunity of having spent time with these communities as well as with the people they serve. I felt their love and welcome. May God continue to shower his blessings on the Assumptionists in this beautiful region of Minas Gerais; may he accompany them as they proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God. And may Mary, the Mother of us all, be with each person that I came to know as we make our way toward communion with God in Jesus Christ, rooted in our Assumptionist spirit.

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