

### Pope Francis embraces guests with skin conditions at Vatican

Francis blessed the men during his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square. 'Too often we are arid, indifferent and detached,' he told an estimated 50,000 people who had gathered to hear him speak on Wednesday morning.

BY [CAROL KURUVILLA](#) / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS  
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Pope Francis (L) hugs a man with neurofibromatosis in Saint Peter's Square at the end of his general audience in Vatican City.

Pope Francis received two special guests during his general audience at the Vatican on Wednesday. Two men with visible skin diseases came forward to receive blessings from the pontiff. Francis reached out and touched these men, as if they were no different from the 50,000 others who had assembled in St. Peter's Square that morning.

The man in the red jacket appears to have neurofibromatosis, according to Dr. Gary Goldenberg, an assistant professor of dermatology and pathology at Mount Sinai. Patients who are born with the disease grow thousands of tumors all over their bodies.

The tumors can be irritating and can sometimes cause other abnormalities. But the psychological effects of the disease do the most damage.



*Pope Francis blesses a pilgrim who had made the pilgrimage to St. Peter's Square.*

**PHOTOS: POPE FRANCIS ARRIVES IN RIO DE JANEIRO**

"It is a devastating condition," Goldenberg, who has treated patients with neurofibromatosis, told The News. "A lot of them don't want to go outside because they have tumors all over their bodies. These patients suffer quite a bit."

Goldenberg couldn't confirm the skin condition of the second man.



*Francis (C) waves as he arrives by Popemobile to lead his Wednesday general audience.*

People who aren't educated about these skin disease have the tendency to incorrectly believe they are contagious, Goldenberg said.

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But Pope Francis had no qualms about accepting his guests.



*Pope Francis kisses a sleeping child as he leaves at the end of his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, Wednesday, Nov. 6, 2013.*

The Pope's weekly audiences draw thousands of pilgrims from around the world, many with illnesses who wait for hours to get a glimpse of the holy man.

During the eight months that he's held the keys of St. Peter, the 76-year-old has been praised by people inside and outside of the Catholic Church for his efforts to reach out to the poor and to those who don't share his beliefs. Although he has never veered away from established Church doctrine, his open style and willingness to talk about taboo topics is seen by many as a breath of fresh air.



*Pope Francis reached out to a child as he drives through the crowds at St. Peter's Square.*

The Pope drew the ire of traditionalists just a few weeks after his election in March, when he stooped down to wash and kiss the feet of two female inmates — a Serbian Muslim and an Italian Catholic.

In his speech on Wednesday, the Pope emphasized that Christians shouldn't practice "nickel and dime" charity. Instead, he wants his flock of 1.2 billion Catholics to yearn for "something deeper: a communion that makes us able to enter into the joy and the sorrow of others and sincerely make them our own."

"Too often we are arid, indifferent and detached, and rather than transmitting brotherhood, we transmit discontentment, coldness, selfishness," he said, in a translation provided by CNS.

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"Can you help the church grow that way?" the pope asked his crowd of faithful. The people replied, "No."

Francis told them, "The church grows only with love."