

Her body was carried on a firetruck, with an honor guard of cadets from the military police, for a procession of six kilometers. To this day, she remains known to all as the “Mother of the Poor” and the “Good Angel of Bahia.” She was buried in the Basilica of Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Our Lady of the da Praia In 2001, her body was moved to the Church of the Convent of St. Anthony, next to her charitable foundation. On June 9, 2010, the conclusion of canonical recognition of her mortal remains was celebrated, and her body was moved into a tomb in the new church of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God in Salvador. It was discovered that her body was naturally incorrupt and even her clothes were still preserved 18 years after her death.

The legacy of Sister Dulce, known as “the Good Angel of Brazil,” remains alive in the institutions she founded, specifically the Sister Dulce Social Works, The most notable of these is the Charitable Works Foundation of Sister Dulce (Obras Sociais Irmã Dulce, OSID), which is today one of Brazil's largest and most respected philanthropic organizations, continuing her mission of providing healthcare, education, and social services to the underserved populations of Brazil. It is a private charity chartered under Brazilian law and serves over 3 million people annually.

Though physically petite, Irmã Dulce had strength that derived from her faith and love for God’s children. Her legacy is one of tireless dedication, charity, and unyielding faith. Irmã Dulce’s impact extended beyond healthcare. She created a social work school and opened a public library to cater to those less privileged. Her life was a testament to the power of kindness, proving that small acts can spark significant changes. She is the first Brazilian female saint.

She said, “If there were more love, the world would be different; if we loved more, there would be less war. It all comes down to this: Do your best for your brother, and therefore there will be peace on earth.”

### **Socials with the Saints**

**PILGRIM CENTER of HOPE** | Guiding People to Christ  
PilgrimCenterofHope.org | 210-521-3377

Sources include: *Give Us This Day*, CatholicSaints.Day, FindTheSaint.com, MaryPages.com

## ***St. (Irma) Dulce Pontes***

**Born:** 26 May 1914

**Died:** 13 March 1992

**Feast Day:** 13 August

**Patronage:** Bahia, Brazil;  
Healthcare Workers, Hospital  
Administrators; Social Workers

Baptized Maria Rita de Souza Brito Lopes Pontes, she was born in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, into a devout Catholic family. Maria was the second daughter and second of five children of Augusto Lopes Pontes and Dulce Maria de Souza. She was a joyful, active child who enjoyed soccer and kite flying. Augusto was a dentist and professor, well-known and remembered for his devotion to the Catholic faith and dedication to the poor.

When Maria was 13, her Aunt Madalena took her to visit a poor neighborhood in Salvador. This experience inspired the young Maria; she flung open the doors of her family’s house and turned it into a refuge for people who were poor, needy, and sick. She even gave haircuts for free. Determined not to turn anyone away, she begged her neighbors and relatives to help supply what was needed. Maria’s family offered their support and encouragement to care for the sick. Because of her work, her family home became known as “The San Francisco Gatehouse.” At just 13-years-old, she told her father that she wanted to work to help the poor. Like St. Thérèse of Lisieux, to whom Maria had a devotion, she believed tiny acts of love were the way to spread the love of Christ. Feeling a strong calling to religious life, she said she was ready to perform the “small acts of love” that Jesus transforms into great works.

While attending a school for teachers in Salvador de Bahia, she made the acquaintance of a Franciscan tertiary and later met the Provincial Superior of the Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception. After graduating with a teaching qualification February 8, 1933, Maria left for the Brazilian municipality of São Cristóvão (San Cristobal; Saint



Christopher) in the neighboring state of Sergipe in order to begin her new life with the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God (SMIC), a Franciscan order. When she made her vows, Maria took the name Dulce in memory of her mother, who had died when Maria was only seven years old. Returning to the city of Salvador for three months as a volunteer nurse, she took a course in applied medicine.

Sister Dulce's dedication to serving the sick and the poor was unyielding. In 1935, she founded the first Christian workers' movement of Salvador: the St. Francis Labor Union, as well as the Labor Society of Bahia in 1937. The next year, she began working with the poor communities of Alagados and Itapagipe. Those she ministered to began calling her the "Angel of Alagados." In 1939, she opened the School of St. Anthony, a public school for working class people and their children, in the Massaranduba quarter of Salvador.

In the same year, she began to house the sick in abandoned houses in a rundown area of Salvador called "Ilha dos Ratos" (Rats' Island) district. She would go in search of food, medicine, and medical care. It is said she used to play the accordion in the streets, busking, and raising whatever money she could to use for the convent's mission of caring for the poor. Later, when she and her patients were evicted from the neighborhood, she started housing them in an old fish market, but City Hall denied her the use of the space and told her to leave.

In 1949, after a series of evictions, and facing the big problem of taking care of over 70 people, Sister Dulce turned to the Mother Superior of her convent and asked her permission to use the convent's chicken yard as an improvised hostel. Sister Dulce's Superior said she could use the henhouse/chicken coop-turned-shelter attached to the convent; on condition she took care of the chickens. She did; by feeding them to her sick patients! On February 8, 1983, that chicken coop became the present-day Santo Antonio Hospital, a 1500-bed health care center specializing in cancer treatment, which the people of Bahia considered another "miracle of Irma Dulce." The hospital was established on the principle of treating the whole person and not just the body, and stressed the importance of laughter to help patients recover.

Sister Dulce founded Charitable Works Foundation of Sister Dulce (Obras Sociais Irmã Dulce or OSID) in 1959 with statutes drawn up by her father, Augusto. This foundation is one of the foremost charitable healthcare organizations in the entire country, specializing not only in healthcare, but also in education and scientific research. Performing more than 5.6 million outpatient procedures per year and serving 1.2 million meals per year to patients, it is open to a broad range of people in need, including the elderly, the homeless, children and adolescents considered "at risk", victims of addiction, and people with disabilities and deformities.

In July of 1979, Cardinal Avelar Brandão Vilela, Archbishop of Salvador, invited Mother Teresa of Calcutta to open a house in Alagados. Sister Dulce took this opportunity to meet her. In 1980, Sister Dulce's work impressed the President of Brazil, José Sarney, who in 1988 nominated her for the Nobel Peace Prize with the support of Queen of Sweden. In 1988, she was awarded the prize Educator of the Year by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). She had the opportunity to meet with Mother Teresa once and Pope John Paul II twice—the second time as she lay in the hospital, not long before her death.

During the last 30 years of her life, Sister Dulce's lungs were highly impaired. She had only thirty percent breathing capacity. Despite facing many health challenges, she continued to attend daily Mass, often carrying her oxygen tank with her. This faithful devotion exhibits the Catholic teaching of the Real Presence—the belief in Jesus Christ's presence in the Eucharist.

In 1990, her respiratory problems began to worsen, and she was hospitalized. In October of 1991, Pope John Paul II came to Salvador, and wanted to visit Sister Dulce. Cardinal Lucas Moriera Neves recalled that the Holy Father said many times: "This is the suffering of an innocent, just like the suffering of Jesus." She approached all her suffering by giving herself to the Lord's embrace. After being hospitalized for 16 months, at the age of 77, Sister Dulce passed away of respiratory failure and cardiopulmonary arrest on March 13, 1992 in Santo Antônio's Convent in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.