

EDITORIAL

Celebration of the first World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly

Pope Francis has announced a Year of the Family, which he opened on 19 March, the fifth anniversary of the publication of his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.

In this context, as he has always valued the life and role of the elderly, he took a concrete decision, which he announced during the Angelus prayer on 31 January 2021: that of instituting a World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly, to be held each year on the fourth Sunday in July. This year, it will be on 25 July.

On 22 June, a press conference launched the Day. It was opened by Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life. His introduction, which explained what the Day was all about, is the subject of the first article in this newsletter. Three lay people then spoke, including Monique Bodhuin, President of Vie Montante Internationale. You can read her text later.

The theme chosen was: it is important to give the elderly our full attention. They can and do give us much.

The Pope issued a message from which you can read large excerpts. He insists, once again, on the vocation of grandparents and the elderly. He makes a specific appeal to them: "I would like to tell you that we need you to build the world of tomorrow in fraternity and social friendship. For this, they can rely on "three pillars: dreams, memory and prayer".

These three texts are long but very rich. They constitute a foundation of values for an updated pastoral ministry.

This Day has been lived out in many ways and celebrated all over the world: in Strasbourg, in Uganda, in India, in Manila, in Kuala Lumpur, etc. You can get a glimpse of it through the testimonies that close this newsletter.

I hope you enjoy reading it.

Dominique Lemau de Talancé

POST

Introduction by Cardinal K Farrell

The World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly is a celebration. We really needed it: after such a difficult year we truly need to celebrate, grandparents and grandchildren, young and old. "We should celebrate and rejoice" says the Father in the parable. A new page opens after dramatic months of difficulty. Pope Francis invites us to take a step further, he speaks to us of tenderness.

Tenderness towards the elderly is needed because, as the Holy Father recalls in the message we present to you today, the Virus "has been much harsher with them". For this reason, the Pope hopes that an angel will visit, and will come down to console them in their solitude, and he imagines that this angel looks like a young person who visits an elderly person.

On the other hand, the *Day* also speaks to us of the tenderness that grandparents show towards their grandchildren, of the solid guide that the elderly can be for many disoriented children, especially in a time like the one we are living in, in which personal interaction has become rare.

Tenderness is not just a private feeling, one that soothes wounds, but a way of relating to others, which should also be experienced in public. We have become accustomed to living alone, to not hugging each other, to considering the other as a threat to our health. Our societies, the Pope tells us in *Fratelli Tutti (All Brothers)*, are now fragmented.

Tenderness can become a way of life, which stems from the heart, from the gaze of compassion, and is converted

into thoughts and actions imbued with authentic charity. "I am with you always" - the theme of the Day that we are about to celebrate - is the promise that each one of us has received from the Lord and that each one of us is called to repeat to his brothers and sisters.

Tenderness has a social value, affirmed in the Celebration of this Day. It is a remedy we all need and our elderly are those who can provide it. In a frayed and hardened society emerging from the pandemic, not only is there a need for vaccines and economic recovery (albeit fundamental), but also for relearning the art of relationships. In this, grandparents and the elderly can be our teachers. This is also why they are so important.

The message we present today is both loving and demanding towards grandparents and the elderly. The Holy Father addresses them with affectionate words, but also announces to them the call to "a renewed vocation in a crucial time in history". There are three elements that characterize this call: "dreams, memory and prayer". The Lord's closeness - says the Pope - will give the strength even to the most fragile among us to embark upon a new path, along the paths of dreams, memory and prayer". However, what appears to be most relevant is not so much how this vocation is declined, rather the fact that they are considered the recipients of a specific call. In the Church, grandparents and the elderly have a place of honour, and the *Day* we celebrate intends to reaffirm this.

In pastoral care, each of our communities is invited to not consider the elderly as customers of our social services, rather to consider them as the protagonists of our programs and to enhance their spirituality. Putting grandparents and the elderly at the center, grasping the value of their presence is also the only true alternative to a throwaway culture. The opposite of waste is not only the works of charity (albeit necessary), but pastoral attention, in the awareness of the value they represent for families, the Church and society.

Now I would like to focus on a theme dear to the Holy Father: the wisdom of the elderly. Insisting on wisdom does not stem from the idea that elderly people are endowed with greater wisdom than others, rather they have an experiential wisdom – the wisdom of many years of life.

The elderly are a great resource for getting out of a crisis, better and not worse. This is above all to help us understand that what we are experiencing is not the first crisis, nor will it be the last, and that the story of mankind is placed in a history that transcends them. In the message, the Pope tells every elderly

person that "it is necessary that you too bear witness that it is possible to come out renewed from a trial experience" and he cites, as an example, then experience of war, through which so many have lived.

Not disdaining the older generation means not being overwhelmed by the present. The obstacles we experience today and that seem insurmountable acquire the right proportions when viewed in the long-term perspective. It is in this sense that the experience of the elderly can help young people: help them to understand their own life in a more detached and realistic manner, with the carefulness necessary for making good choices. How many times has a grandparent helped a grandchild understand that a seemingly great disappointment is just a new path that the Lord is pointing to?



Cardinal Kevin Farrell

Internet

Similarly, shouldn't knowing that the Church was born from the experience of generations of Christians, who preceded and nourished us with their faith, lead us to understand that the crises we experience are only steps along the journey of a people throughout history? Pope Francis dedicated some important passages of "*Fratelli Tutti*" precisely to the need to not lose historical awareness, valuing grandparents, who are the voice and presence of this awareness.

I hope that the *World Day for Grand-parents and the Elderly* helps us to grow in our love for the elderly and to discover them as teachers of tenderness, guardians over our roots and dispensers of wisdom. For our part, the whole Church repeats to every grandparent and to every elder: "we will be with you always", until the end of time".

Speech by Monique Bodhuin for VMI

I am very grateful to His Eminence Cardinal Farrell for the honour he has bestowed on me by inviting me to speak here on behalf of Vie Montante Internationale (VMI), a Catholic action movement with some forty thousand members spread over all the continents and whose mission is based on three pillars: friendship, spirituality and involvement in society.

This First World Day of Grandparents and the elderly is a beautiful event; I thank the Cardinal and his collaborators for having organised it; a first that must not be without follow-up...

The Holy Father's message gives the meaning and the tone of this day; in addition to the orientations that can be drawn from it, its content is a source of beautiful and strong hope for all older people.

The quotation from Matthew that opens the Holy Father's message, "I am with you always", is a declaration of great tenderness; this closeness to the Lord to which Matthew's words refer can be translated into the daily life of the elderly by a few simple gestures or moments: it is the child's hand that they hold and that takes them for a walk, it is the joy of the games and childish laughter that brighten up their loneliness and break the silence of the passing hours. It is up to each of us to find ways of expressing the affectionate presence and sincere tenderness that the elderly need to nourish their desire to live.

This desire to live has been undermined for more than a year by the pandemic; long before the Covid-19 virus turned the world upside down, Pope Francis never missed an opportunity to tell the Church and the world that caring for the elderly is the duty of every man and woman worthy of that duty. For him, a civilisation that neglects its elders is a lost civilisation... The elderly has paid a heavy price for the pandemic: the information received from certain countries showed that they had experienced increased solitude, the health and safety measures had greatly disrupted their desire to live, and what can be said of the suffering of those who, hospitalised, were forbidden to visit and died alone and abandoned? How can our conscience as Christians not be challenged by these situations?

With this First Day of Grandparents and the Elderly, we want to tell grandparents and the elderly that they have a full place in our hearts and beyond, that the ecclesial community recognises them as a full part of it; this event invites us to be the bearers of this message of closeness, to play the role of angels - the Greek word "annguelos", from which it derives, means "one who proclaims". We will be those angels on that day, and we will continue to be so during the months to come, in order to give this day its full meaning.

In the Holy Father's words, I find the objectives of the international congress organised in Rome at the end of January 2020 under the title "The Richness of Years". This Congress was underpinned by a number of strong ideas: to take into account the particular gifts of old age, to give older people a full place in the ecclesial community, to allow them to play out the role that their human experience, made up of joys but also of trials, authorises them with the younger generations.

The words of the Holy Father emphasise the importance of the intergenerational link; likewise, the Year of the Family, which began on 19 March, invites us to implement this dimension, since grandparents are part of the family. Grandparents play a crucial role in the family, whatever it may be, as witnesses of life for the younger generations: it is based on their roots, on the memory they carry, on their life experience, which helps them to understand what is essential, on their "knowing how to be", on their relationship with Christ, who gives meaning to their lives.

This link between grandparents and grandchildren, but also more broadly

between young people and the elderly, will be celebrated by the MCR, Mouvement Chrétien des Retraités, the French branch of VMI, on 25 July, in a very festive way: after the Eucharist, there will be a "snack time", a time when we share the joy of being together, then exchanges on the theme "young and not so young, let's share our dreams and let's build tomorrow's world". This project has given rise to a partnership between VMI and the MCR and will be the subject of an official launch in Taizé, in the presence of Brother Alois, in which I will participate.

This event must not make us forget those who could not participate in the day; we must go to them, to those isolated people who are particularly in need of a presence: read with them the message of the Holy Father, recite with them the prayer of the Holy Father which refers to the unfailing presence of the Lord in their everyday lives. This is a way of inserting these isolated elderly people into the pastoral community and recognising their dignity as beloved sons and daughters of God. And we must not stop there...

For me, this first celebration of grandparents and the elderly is a starting point; it carries with it a dimension of openness to the future: to be faithful to our mission as baptised people, "we must always set out on a journey, but above all we must leave ourselves, to undertake something new", as the Holy Father writes. This new thing could be:

- training structures to live better this art of being grandparents or simply elderly people: the challenge is to be authentic "passers and awakeners of faith"
- transversal structures where the elderly and young people will meet to exchange in truth on the "art of being" to which the elderly can bear witness, but also on the desire that each young person carries within him or herself, to build this alliance between young and older people that Pope Francis calls for.

I will conclude by quoting the Holy Father, because these few words are rich in hope for the future and give direction: "Who better than young people to take the dreams of the elderly and turn them into reality. But to do this, we must continue to dream".

Message from Pope Francis: "I am with you always"

"I am with you always" (Mt 28:20): this is the promise the Lord made to his disciples before he ascended into heaven. They are the words that he repeats to you today, dear grandfathers and grandmothers, dear older friends. "I am with you always" are also the words that I, as Bishop of Rome and an older person like yourselves, would like to address to you on this first World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly. The whole Church is close to you – to us – and cares about you, loves you and does not want to leave you feeling solitary!

I am well aware that this Message comes to you at a difficult time: the pandemic swept down on us like an unexpected and furious storm; it has been a time of trial for everyone, but especially for we older people. Many of us fell ill, others died or experienced the death of spouses or loved ones, while others found themselves isolated and alone for long periods.

The Lord is aware of all that we have been through in this time. He is close to those who felt isolated and alone, feelings that became more acute during the pandemic. Tradition has it that Saint Joachim, the grandfather of Jesus, felt estranged from those around him because he had no children; his life, like that of his wife Anne, was considered useless. So the Lord sent an angel to console him. While he mused sadly outside the city gates, a messenger from the Lord appeared to him and said, "Joachim, Joachim! The Lord has heard your insistent prayer". Giotto, in one of his celebrated frescoes, seems to set the scene at night, one of those many sleepless nights, filled with memories,

worries and longings to which many of us have come to be accustomed.

Even at the darkest moments, as in these months of pandemic, the Lord continues to send *angels* to console our loneliness and to remind us: "I am with you always". He says this to you, and he says it to me. That is the meaning of this Day, which I wanted to celebrate for the first time in this particular year, as a long period of isolation ends and social life slowly resumes. May every grandfather, every grandmother, every older person, especially those among us who are most alone, receive the visit of an *angel*! At times those angels will have the face of our grandchildren, at others, the face of family members, lifelong friends or those we have come to know during these trying times, when we have learned how important hugs and visits are for each of us. How sad it makes me that in some places these are still not possible!

The Lord, however, also sends us messengers through his words, which are always at hand. Let us try to read a page of the Gospel every day, to pray with the psalms, to read the prophets! We will be comforted by the Lord's faithfulness. The Scriptures will also help us to understand what the Lord is asking of our lives today. For at every hour of the day (cf. *Mt 20:1-16*) and in every season of life, he continues to send labourers into his vineyard. I was called to become the Bishop of Rome when I had reached, so to speak, retirement age and thought I would not be doing anything new. The Lord is always – *always* – close to us. He is close to us with new possibilities, new ideas, new consolations, but always close to us. You know that the Lord is eternal; he never, ever goes into retirement.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells the Apostles, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (28:19-20). These words are also addressed to us today. They help us better understand that our vocation is to preserve our roots, to pass on the faith to the young, and to care for the little ones. Think about it: what is our vocation today, at our age? To preserve our roots, to pass on the faith to the young and to care for the little ones. Never forget this.

It makes no difference how old you are, whether you still work or not, whether you are alone or have a family, whether you became a grandmother or grandfather at a young age or later, whether you are still independent or need assistance. Because there is no retirement age from the work of proclaiming the Gospel and handing down traditions to your grandchildren. You just need to set out and undertake something new.



Pape François

internet

At this crucial moment in history, you have a renewed vocation. You may wonder: How this can be possible? My energy is running out and I don't think I can do much. How can I begin to act differently when habit is so much a part of my life? How can I devote myself to those who are poor when I am already so concerned about my family? How can I broaden my vision when I can't even leave the residence where I live? Isn't my solitude already a sufficiently heavy burden? How many of you are asking just that question: isn't my solitude already a sufficiently heavy burden? Jesus himself heard a similar question from Nicodemus, who asked, "How can a man be born again when he is old?" (*Jn 3:4*). It can happen, the Lord replies, if we open our hearts to the working of the Holy Spirit, who blows where he wills. The Holy Spirit whose freedom is such that goes wherever, and does whatever, he wills.

As I have often observed, we will not emerge from the present crisis as we were before, but either better or worse. And "God willing... this may prove not to be just another tragedy of history from which we learned nothing... If only we might keep in mind all those elderly persons who died for lack of

respirators... If only this immense sorrow may not prove useless, but enable us to take a step forward towards a new style of life. If only we might discover once for all that we need one another, and that in this way our human frailty can experience a rebirth” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 35). No one is saved alone. We are all indebted to one another. We are all brothers and sisters.

Given this, I want to tell you that you are needed in order to help build, in fraternity and social friendship, the world of tomorrow: the world in which we, together with our children and grandchildren, will live once the storm has subsided. All of us must “take an active part in renewing and supporting our troubled societies” (*ibid.*, 77). Among the pillars that support this new edifice, there are three that you, better than anyone else, can help to set up. Those three pillars are *dreams*, *memory* and *prayer*. The Lord’s closeness will grant to all, even the frailest among us, the strength needed to embark on a new journey along the path of dreams, memory and prayer.

The prophet Joel once promised: “Your old men shall dream *dreams*, and your young men will have visions” (3:1). The future of the world depends on this covenant between young and old. Who, if not the young, can take the dreams of the elderly and make them come true? Yet for this to happen, it is necessary that we continue to dream. Our dreams of justice, of peace, of solidarity can make it possible for our young people to have new visions; in this way, together, we can build the future. You need to show that it is possible to emerge renewed from an experience of hardship. I am sure that you have had more than one such experience: in your life you have faced any number of troubles and yet were able to pull through. Use those experiences to learn how to pull through now.

Dreams are thus intertwined with *memory*. I think of the painful memory of war, and its importance for helping the young to learn the value of peace. Those among you who experienced the suffering of war must pass on this message. Keeping memory alive is a true mission for every elderly person: keeping memory alive and sharing it with others. Edith Bruck, who survived the horror of the Shoah, has said that “even illuminating a single conscience is worth the effort and pain of keeping alive the memory of what has been.” She went on to say: “For me, memory is life.” I also think of my own grandparents, and those among you who had to emigrate and know how hard it is to leave everything behind, as so many people continue to do today, in hope of a future. Some of those people may even now be at our side, caring for us. These kinds of memory can help to build a more humane and welcoming world. Without memory, however, we will never be able to build; without a foundation, we can never build a house. Never. And the foundation of life is memory.

Finally, prayer. As my predecessor, Pope Benedict, himself a saintly elderly person who continues to pray and work for the Church, once said: “the prayer of the elderly can protect the world, helping it perhaps more effectively than the frenetic activity of many others.” He spoke those words in 2012, towards the end of his pontificate. There is something beautiful here. Your prayer is a very precious resource: a deep breath that the Church and the world urgently need (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 262). Especially in these difficult times for our human family, as we continue to sail in the same boat across the stormy sea of the pandemic, your intercession for the world and for the Church has great value: it inspires in everyone the serene trust that we will soon come to shore.

Dear grandmother, dear grandfather, dear older friends, in concluding this Message to you, I would also like to mention the example of Blessed (and soon Saint) Charles de Foucauld. He lived as a hermit in Algeria and there testified to “his desire to feel himself a brother to all” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 287). The story of his life shows how it is possible, even in the solitude of one’s own desert, to intercede for the poor of the whole world and to become, in truth, a universal brother or sister.

I ask the Lord that, also through his example, all of us may open our hearts in sensitivity to the sufferings of the poor and intercede for their needs. May each of us learn to repeat to all, and especially to the young, the words of consolation we have heard spoken to us today: “I am with you always”! Keep moving forward! May the Lord grant you his blessing!

How a team in Strasbourg celebrated the First World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly.

The team leader of the Christian Movement of the Retired (MCR) contacted the leader of ACE (Catholic Action for Children) to define the content of a meeting between young people from ACE and MCR members which was an opportunity for both movements to restart their activities and to enter the Amoris Laetitia year. "Attention to the elderly is thus inserted into the usual fabric of our pastoral work" (Cardinal Farrell).

They organised a time of exchange between the elderly and young people over a snack; the theme was the start of the new school year. The older people present were invited to talk about the school of their childhood; old school equipment was presented in an explanatory way; Marie-Jo recounted her first morning at school, which was very different from those of today; other older people spoke about "their school" during the Second World War.

With this meeting they wanted to make a modest response to the mission that the Holy Father entrusts to all the elderly: to pass on the roots to the young, to make memory. The meeting concluded with a Mass of thanksgiving led by the participants, old and young. The prayer intentions gave thanks for this time of renewed fruitfulness that old age must be, for this link between the generations.

Celebration of the First World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly in Uganda

Life Ascending Uganda (LAU), the Apostolate of the Elderly, as well as the Apostolate of the Youth made big plans for the day. All the dioceses were ready to mark the day in a significant way. Seniors' and Grandparents' Day once again brought life and hope with the realisation that they were truly cared for, honoured and loved even during lock-down.

Thank God for modern technology which, in this digital age, offers solutions. With the support of young people who are technically more adept at using digital technologies, the celebration was possible.

From 19 to 24 July: various activities throughout the dioceses: Conferences on Radio Maria broadcasting the message of Pope Francis and transmitting the Church's message of love to older people and grandparents. In addition, awareness-raising messages on the role and importance of the elderly in the Church and society were shared. The challenges of this age group were also highlighted. This brought much excitement to older listeners. There were many calls to the studios expressing their recognition to the Holy Father. The children called out their gratitude to their grandparents. The silence of lock-down was broken.



Life Ascending Uganda

Charity activities: The Apostleship of Elders (LAU) and the Apostleship of Youth organised a national charity week in support of needy older people and grandparents at family and small community level. Charitable activities ranged from physical donations to support with household chores.

July 25: We had the Pontifical Mass at Kampala Cathedral led by His Eminence, Bishop Paul Ssemogerere, Chairman of the Commission for the Apostolate of the Laity.

The LAU had the opportunity to address the elders and congratulate them on the first day of the worldwide celebration in their honour. Due to the confinement situation, it was a virtual mass, broadcast on TV, radio, Facebook and YouTube.

In the Little Sisters' Homes

The Day was enthusiastically welcomed in all our homes, where it gave rise to a wide variety of activities...

Everywhere the message of Pope Francis was given to all the residents translated into the language of the country (e.g. in Kannada, in MYSORE, India). The message was taken up and commented on by the chaplains or the Little Sisters, and led to meetings of reflection in small groups, often prepared by questionnaires, on the themes of the message. In ST ETIENNE, residents, Little Sisters and

staff members discussed two questions: one for the residents "Old age is a gift, how do you live it", and for the staff, "Old age is a gift, how do you see it? In ST DENIS, a writing workshop invited residents to share memories of their own grandparents! It was moving to see a lady who hardly ever speaks fill two pages!

Sunday 25 July was a day of celebration everywhere, convivial and joyful, often in the privacy of the house. Fervent Eucharistic celebrations, with the active participation of the elderly; novenas or days of spiritual preparation. In some places (e.g. England, USA) it was the first time in months that people could gather and sing in the chapel!

Delicious festive meals and a variety of activities, adapted to the tastes and cultures of the country, could not be missed: here Bingo, there regional dances, songs, etc.

In SYDNEY, a "Talent Show" highlighted the gifts of the residents. Trees were planted in honour of the residents, a rose was offered to each one, with a little note "I am with you every day"...

In MANILA (Philippines), where visits were not yet possible, the Little Sisters asked groups of young people to send personal wishes to the residents by name. This was a great joy for the residents, most of whom have no one. While in COTONOU (Benin), a Christian group wanted to respond to the invitation of Pope Francis by coming to share a meal with the elderly and have a good time with them.

Finally, in KUALA LUMPUR (Malaysia), it was the residents themselves, in gratitude for this Day, who decided to be "angels" for each other and to take the time to visit the sick in the infirmary.

■ NEWS FROM MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

AIC : AIC has been invited by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life to participate :

- in the preparation of the Synod of Bishops 2023 which will have as its theme: "For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission". A team of 6 people has been formed with AIC volunteers from Mexico, France, USA, Laos, Italy and the international chaplain.

- The President and a member of the Board attended a meeting in the Vatican on the theme of governance responsibility in lay associations as a service to the Church. The President and a member of the Board attended.

To everyone's surprise, it was Pope Francis himself who introduced the meeting by addressing a long message to the participants. The Holy Father insisted on the ecclesial mission of the international associations of the faithful and raised two

obstacles that can arise in the exercise of government: the "desire for power" which manifests itself in the "desire to be everywhere", which cancels out any form of subsidiarity, making the governors believe that they can make decisions on all aspects of the life of the association and of the people who are part of it, and which also leads the governors to perpetuate themselves in power; and "disloyalty", which is typical of those who make themselves the sole interpreters of the charism and, under the pretext of wanting to serve the Lord, serve only themselves. In the exercise of a governing role, therefore, the Holy Father insisted, we must learn to consider ourselves as "useless servants" (Lk 17:10), in order to remain humble and docile to the will of God, as Jesus showed us when he washed the disciples' feet.

Cardinal Farrell went on to emphasise governance as a service to the people, the charism and the mission of the Church.

On the occasion of grandparents' day, the AIC President sent a message to all members. Several responses came from UL, Dominican Republic, Brazil, Mexico, Syria, all stressing the importance of the role of grandparents in the transmission of values.