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## Special Bulletin Rome 2020 « The richness of many years »



**The  
richness  
of many  
years of life**

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE ELDERLY

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## Editorial

This Bulletin provides you with the speeches content of " the richness of many years of life" to the Congress and of our Steering Committee working sessions. Two events that took place at the beginning of 2020, in Rome, in a world that was not quite the same as today.

It is impossible to ignore the ordeal of the pandemic that is still affecting the entire planet; I do not forget the pain of the death of a loved one, nor the anguish of many in the face of the uncertainty of the future, but the health crisis may also have given life, as I have experienced occasionally, to some luminous moments enlightening what gives full meaning to our condition as a man and to our Christian being.

Prohibited from contact with loved ones, we have rediscovered the infinite value of family ties, friendships and united gestures that give life its priceless price; having to give up group meetings, community sharing of the Eucharist, we became aware of the depth of the bonds that nourish our life of faith.

These bonds build us and take full force at the stage of old age that Pope Francis presents to us "as the season of giving and dialogue", an image whose Congress explores the different dimensions.

**Dialogue season...:** dialogue between generations so that elders can pass on to the youngest their science of life and their testimony of faith, so that together they may respond "to God's plan of love"; call of the elders to benefit from a "catechesis" in order to continue to grow in their spiritual life.

**Gift season...:** elders who put their availability and talents at the service of society, who want to serve the Church to be evangelization actors; able-bodied elders who accompany their brethren marked by fragility and illness to alert to the culture of waste permeating our society.

Let us read and meditate on these interventions which present the many facets of this "wealth of many years of life " and let us value it.

We are called to

**"creatively invent"**

**"a new and intergenerational pastoral care"**

concluded Gabriella Gambino.

A challenge for our Movement.

**Monique Bodhuin**



# Speech by Pope Francis at the special audience: "The present and the future of the Church"

Dear brothers and sisters,

I warmly welcome you, to you who participate in the first International Congress of Pastoral Care for the Elderly, "The Richness of many years," organized by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, and I thank Cardinal Farrell for his kind words.

The "wealth of years" is the wealth of people, of each person in particular, who has many years of life, experience and history behind it. It is the precious treasure that takes shape on the path of the life of every man and woman, regardless of its origins, its economic or social conditions. Because life is a gift, and when it is long, it is a privilege, for oneself and for others. Always, it is always that way.

In the 21st century, old age has become one of the hallmarks of humanity. In a few decades, the demographic pyramid, which at one time relied on large numbers of children and young people, and which had few elderly people at the top, has been reversed. If, at a time, the elderly could have populated a small state, today they could populate an entire continent. In this sense, the considerable presence of elderly people is a novelty for all social and geographical environments of the world. Moreover, today, old age corresponds to different seasons of life: for many, it is the age when productive commitment ceases, when forces decline and appear the signs of illness and the need to be helped, as well as social isolation; but for many, it is the beginning of a long period of physical and psychological well-being and freedom from professional obligations.

In these two types of situations, how to live these years? What is the meaning of this phase of life, which for many can be long? The social disarray and, in many ways, the indifference and refusal that our societies show towards the elderly, invite not only the Church, but everyone else, to a series

of reflections to learn to grasp and appreciate the value of old age. Indeed, while, on the one hand, States must confront the new demographic situation in economic terms, on the other, civil society needs values and meanings for the third and fourth ages. And this is where the contribution of the ecclesial community lies.

That is why I welcomed with interest the initiative of this congress, which focused its attention on pastoral care for the elderly and launched a reflection on the implications that arise from a significant presence of grandparents in our parishes and societies. I ask you that this does not remain an isolated initiative but marks the beginning of a path of pastoral deepening and discernment. We must change our pastoral habits to know how to respond to the presence of so many elderly people in our families and communities.

In the Bible, longevity is a blessing. It confronts us with our fragility, mutual dependence, our family and community ties, and above all our divine parentage. By granting old age, God our Father gives us time to deepen our knowledge of him, our intimacy with him, to enter ever more into his heart and abandon us to Him. It is time to prepare to put our mind back in his hands, definitively, with the confidence of the sons. But it is also a time of renewed fertility. "In their old age, they will still bear fruit," says the psalmist (Ps 91,15). God's plan of salvation, in fact, is also realized in the poverty of weak, sterile and helpless bodies. From Sara's sterile breast and the century-old body of Abraham, the chosen people were born (cf. Rm 4,18-20). Of Elisabeth and the old Zacharias was born John the Baptist. The elderly, even when he is weak, can become the instrument of the history of salvation.

Aware of this irreplaceable role of the elderly, the Church is the place where generations are called to share God's project of love, in a reciprocal exchange of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This intergenerational sharing forces us to change our outlook on the elderly, to learn to look to the future with them.

When we think of the elderly and we talk about them, and all the more so in the pastoral dimension, we have to learn to modify the verb tenses a bit. It is not only the past as if, for the elderly, there is only one life behind them and moldy archives. No! The Lord can and wants to write with them also new pages, pages of holiness, service, prayer... Today, I would like to tell you that the elderly are also the present and the tomorrow of the Church. Yes, they are also the future of a Church that, together with young people, prophesy and dream! That is why it is so important that older people and young people talk to each other, it is particularly important.

The prophecy of the elderly comes true when the light of the Gospel fully enters their lives, when, like Simeon and Anne, they take Jesus in their arms and announce the revolution of tenderness, the Good News of the one who came into the world to bring the light of the Father. That is why I ask you not to spare yourself to proclaim the gospel to grandparents and the elderly. Go to meet them with a smiling face and gospel in hand. Go out on the streets of your parishes and pick up the elderly who live alone. Old age is not a disease, it is a privilege! Loneliness can be a disease, but with charity, closeness and spiritual comfort, we can cure it.

God has a great people of grandparents all over the world. Today, in secularized societies of many countries, today's generations of parents do not, for the most part, have the Christian formation and living faith that grandparents, on the other hand, can pass on to their grandchildren. They are the indispensable ring for educating small children and young people to the faith. We must get used to including them in our pastoral horizons and considering them, in a non-episodic way, as one of the vital components of our communities. They are not only people whom we

are called to assist and protect in order to preserve their lives, but they can be actors of an evangelizing pastoral, privileged witnesses of God's faithful love

That is why I thank all of you who dedicate your pastoral energies to grandparents and the elderly. I know very well that your commitment and your reflection arise from concrete friendship with many elderly people. I hope that what is now the sensibility of a few will become the heritage of all ecclesial communities. Don't be afraid, take initiatives, help your bishops and dioceses to promote pastoral service for the elderly and with the elderly. Don't get discouraged, go ahead! The Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life will continue to accompany you in this work.

Thank You !

At the Vatican, 01/31/2020



# Introduction: "The Church and the Elderly" by His Eminence Cardinal Kevin Farrell Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life

Most Reverend Fathers, Honoured Guests,

Welcome to the First International Congress on the Pastoral Care of the Elderly entitled "The Richness of Many Years".

Your very presence here today and this event in itself are, for us and for our Church, "good tidings". The invitation we addressed to the Episcopal Conferences several months ago to participate in these days of reflection has had a broad and warm response. The large number of registrations received have even forced us to amend the logistics and we express our gratitude to those connected to the conference from the room next door.

The decision to set up our pastoral care of the elderly, to create within the Dicastery an office to deal with this growing phenomenon and to convene you all here in Rome, comes from our obligation to attend pastorally to the ageing.

During the past two years, listening to bishops on ad limina visits to our Dicastery, and likewise to those associations that spend time and effort every day in caring for the elderly, has convinced us of the need for a serious and urgent moment of reflection, to prompt the Universal Church to act on what is revealing itself as a spiritual need and a true and proper pastoral mission.

Listening is one of the fundamental attitudes that the Holy Father requires of those involved in pastoral care: he often talks about "the apostolate of the ear".

For this reason, our meeting is committed to a triple form of listening: listening to the "signs of the times", listening to the Magisterium and listening to your experiences in order to set down together some general guidelines that can be useful to dioceses all over the world.

In fact, one of the key features of the epochal change the Church is experiencing is the shift in the demographic equilibrium among the generations within our communities: a widely studied phenomenon that has occurred in a more evident manner in some environments, but has now spread to all the continents. A recent report issued by the

UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs entitled "World Population Ageing 2019" affirms that "All societies in the world are in the midst of this longevity revolution—some are at its early stages and some are more advanced. But all will pass through this extraordinary transition". It is a true demographic revolution, one of those "signs of the times" that we cannot ignore. In 2100 61% of the world population will be made up of people over 65 years of age and that the elderly population will already double during the next thirty years.

All of this not only has implications of a sociological, economic, anthropological and political nature, but above all raises questions and needs of a spiritual nature that require us to act.

In particular, the pastoral accompaniment required by the elderly is an obvious need as we are faced with the challenge of increasing longevity of life. In our societies, where the "throwaway culture" and the "exclusion of vulnerable" often dominates the collective imagination as well as family, political and social choices, the "richness of many years" is not always welcomed as a blessing, in other words, as a gift. Therefore, in such cases, faced with the perception of old age as a burden, how can the Church accompany society to make it aware how precious a long life is? How can the Church change the prevalent perception of the Richness of years of Life?

The second kind of listening, that will guide us during these days, is listening to the Magisterium of the Church. Our awareness of the need to dedicate pastoral attention to the elderly is not a novelty introduced by the Pope Francis. Already during the eighties, John Paul II explicitly urged the Church to establish a pastoral care program for the elderly. Today, Pope Francis continually places the question at the center of his pastoral actions, insisting on the importance of grandparents in the transmission of faith, on the need for dialogue among the generations, on the importance of the elderly in preserving the roots of God's Faithful People and, especially, on how to overcome the "throwaway culture" related to the elderly.

These are matters we will try to address during this Congress, aware that hearing, consciousness and ecclesial action will develop by starting from the magisterial indications in a non-mechanical way. All three of these aspects require time, assimilation and enculturation, experience and reaching out to the new promptings at a local level.

Our objective is to encourage the perception of responsibility in this specific context of pastoral care that is having difficulty in taking off only in some regions of the world, despite the expansion of the theme on a planetary level.

Specifically, the throwaway culture requires us to act, not only to protect the most vulnerable people but above all to change the cultural and social approach to this phase of human life that can, for very many people, be a source of gifts and richness both for themselves and their communities.

For example, the role played by grandparents, of how in some geographical contexts this is precious and irreplaceable for the care and transmission of the faith to the new generations and whose presence must be promoted in family pastoral care; or about the importance of taking into account intergenerational dialogue in youth pastoral care. All this cannot be taken for granted and requires commitment, perseverance and sense of responsibility on our part.

In conclusion, there is a third kind of listening. We need to listen to some of your experiences. We are able to understand the world better from its peripheries and, as a Dicastery, we need to establish a link with the realities you represent.

We need to hear from you and your experience about the best ways to involve the elderly in the Church's pastoral care projects. The need that I envisage is to develop new approaches to include elderly people in the pastoral life of the Church.

During the months we have been preparing for this conference, we have received a great deal of material from some local dioceses and we were surprised to discover the vast extent and diversity of the initiatives you are carrying out. Unfortunately, on this occasion, it will only be possible to tell you about some of these but our being together here is also an occasion to share them in the intervals of dialogue we will try to offer you, just as we wish to encourage personal encounters among all those present.

For example, it is surprising to discover that some of you go to visit elderly people in the refugee camps in South Sudan, that there are elderly people who visit prisoners in the jails of Senegal, that in Iran the Daughters of Charity talk about Jesus to elderly people who have been abandoned. We have received news from China about the pastoral activities carried out on the occasion of the Chinese New Year.

An initiative we found interesting is that of helping Moldavian elderly people to live together, to share the few resources available to them and ensure themselves of a dignified life. It is also comforting to learn that during recent months, national conferences of operators in the pastoral care of the elderly have been organized in Colombia and Guatemala.

Despite this, there is still a lot of work to be done. Above all — but not only — in Western countries where it is difficult to find pastoral care projects involving them both as recipients and protagonists.

Pastoral care of the elderly is something new. We must — as the Pope would say — implement a process and set up a dialogue that can only be unprecedented.

One of the few certainties we have is Pope Francis' firm opposition to the throwaway culture. When he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires, he talked about the elderly discarded in rest homes like a summer coat in a closet.

More recently he described the abandonment of elderly parents by their own children as a mortal sin. In this sense, we must clearly affirm that families have a huge responsibility towards the elderly.

There are many family pastoral care agents or ministers among you: we need to promote a conversion, human and pastoral, among families with whom you are in contact so that the elderly are no longer discarded!

Let us all remember that the family is the place where they should be able to live and wherever this is not possible, the ecclesial communities must themselves become the family for those who have been deprived of one.

We cannot be indifferent to the removal of elderly people from their families when they are forced to live in anonymous institutions and in some case even become victims of abuse.

.../....

It is our desire during these days to ask ourselves what direction pastoral care of the elderly should take. It is an unexplored field, so much so that we cannot even find a common vocabulary. We have chosen to use the word elderly, anziani, personas mayores, pessoas idosas and personnes âgées, but we are fully aware that, depending on the context, these words take on different nuances and meanings.

Although we are just taking our first steps, I am very happy that some episcopal conferences, such as those of South Korea and Croatia, have decided to study the topic, also as a result of our invitation to Rome. This means that our Congress is already beginning to have some positive effects.

Finally, we are trying to understand how to integrate into our pastoral plans this part of the population that is numerically growing everywhere. And we want to do this based on the experience of certain episcopal conferences, in particular the Latin Americans, who in recent years have succeeded in creating pastoral care for the elderly. In this regard, I would like to mention Dona Zilda Arns, founder of Pastoral da Pessoa Idosa, who died ten years ago while working for the Haitian people after the earthquake.

To these experiences, we must add those of the many associations that you represent, and which constitute a great wealth of thought and action.

We cannot take for granted that all those who grow old have encountered Jesus during their life. As the Holy Father reminded us, we are no longer living in a Christian era. We need some pastoral imagination!

On the other hand, the numbers tell us that the laity of the future will increasingly be composed of people of an advanced age. What is their specific vocation in the Church of tomorrow?

The challenge that awaits us is to gradually construct a common dialogue. You will always find the doors of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life open to listen and cooperate in what we consider one of the contexts on which the future of the Church and society depends.

Therefore, let us ask the Lord to bless the fruit of our Congress and all of us.

Thank You!

+Cardinal Kevin Farrell,  
Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life





## « The age of Longevity» (Abstract) *Giuseppe De Rita, president of the Censis*

It is better to use the word longevity, which refers to the gift of overtime rather than old age which has a more negative burden. The consideration of old age has changed throughout history, from the Phoenicians who promoted a culture of rejection, to the Roman senator Cicero, who in his work "De Senectute", considered the old man as the repository of memory and culture. That is, a person of great importance.

Today, we wonder why the idea that older people are a burden has resurfaced. Basically, below, there is a demographic evolution like we have never experienced. Over the past 70 years, the number of people over the age of 65 in Italy has increased by 283%, the over-80s by 750%, while the population has increased by 20%. This is an evolution for which society is not prepared, given the speed with which this change takes place.

For centuries, the elderly depended on the family, today the elderly are in the care homes at the expense of the pension system, relegated to a residual dimension. The old man is often seen as a burden on others.

In addition to subjective motives, this feeling of being a burden becomes real when the person ceases to be self-sufficient. We are talking about people who live longevity, not a vestige of life. In 70% of cases, the elderly help their grandchildren and children financially and remain the spearhead of the wealth of Italian families. The elderly remains in the breach, so that three and a half million seniors care for their grandchildren and 5 and a half million seniors take care of other seniors.

There are three fundamental aspects in the elderly person's life: loneliness, lack of projects and awareness of being created.

➤ **Loneliness:** As relationships become more and more unstable, there is a desire to break relationships ("Vaffa" in Italian: Don't bother me, leave me alone) and the old man finds himself alone. The only solution is a stronger community culture.

➤ **Lack of projects:** The real problem for older people is that they have no goals (Ravasi). You become a stranger to society because you no longer have an aim. An essential element is to give goals to the elderly, to help them to set aims, self-fulfillment, it is the best way to age. This also applies to 25-year-olds, but for a 75-year-old, the alternative is death.

➤ **The consciousness of having been created:** We are creatures, but we believe that time and old age are our property and that we will never be held to account. This dimension is more accentuated in the old man and is an element that leads to evil dying because we do not realize our status as creatures. If you have the deep humility to accept that you are not even the owner of yourself, but only a creature of God, you will age well.

"Death is the fulfillment of knowledge" (Pratolini). The fulfillment of self-knowledge allows us to leave in peace to the Father's House. Accomplished doesn't mean it's all really over. Jesus on the cross says: "everything is accomplished." And it is "accomplished" means that life has become complete, full.



## « Elderly: a richness for the Church. » (Abstract)

**Prof. Marco Impagliazzo,**

**President of the Sant'Egidio Community (Italy)**

In his introduction, Marco Impagliazzo repeats the words of the Pope stressing "We are not living in an era of change, but a change of era". In his remarks, he will reflect on the contradictory reality of old age: if the physical abilities of the person diminish, the spaces of spiritual life increase. He will do so from a meditation of Psalm 71.

The man of Psalm 71 turns out to be old; he perceives his old age as suffering, as a contempt for himself, as an abandonment even of God. This is the case for the elderly today: noticing their weakness, discovering the irreversibility of the years and the absence of a future, they feel ignored by those around them and considered useless and "anxiety arises from an abyss that engulfs everything".

This condition is found in the psalm which evokes it in realistic terms; but in this world that does not make room for him, the old man turns to God: "In You, Lord, I have taken refuge, I will never be disappointed." God-oriented prayer becomes his escape: "By your justice, set me free and defend me... Be my rock, a dwelling always accessible; You decided to give me salvation: You are my rock, and my fortress." Words that show that God is a refuge and highlight the need for God. Scripture affirms that a long life is a blessing. Our societies, which tend to marginalize older people, have to recognize

that they need them. It is the role of the Church to help society not to despise weakness and fragility, to realize that the lives of the elderly have meaning: their charisma lies in prayer, free welcome, the manifestation of tenderness.

And Marco Impagliazzo to conclude there is a need for pastoral change, for the care of the elderly by Christian communities: speak to the heart so that an art of aging is affirmed "for others and not against others". Freedom, gift, dialogue, gratuitousness, memory, prayer: these are all the prophetic virtues of old age that can make the world more human and the Church more evangelical.



## « The Church alongside the elders », (Abstract)

**Dom José Peruzzo, Archbishop of Curitiba (Brazil)**

In Brazil, there has been, since 2004, a Pastoral Care of the Elderly (Pastoral da pessoa idosa, PPI), the main action of which consists of monthly home visits. This pastoral care is present in 211 dioceses of the country. 25868 pastoral workers accompany 178136 elderly people and 144136 families. Pastoral workers, also known as community supervisors, receive training from the Pastoral of the Elderly. Men and women, religious and lay, they animate local teams of volunteers and initiate them in particular to the prayerful reading of the word of God.

Through its actions, the Pastoral aims to value the elderly, to enable them to live with dignity, responsible in the areas of their health and rights. Family members are also involved in strengthening family ties and avoiding placement.

The action of this Pastoral has a political dimension that is exercised in participation in the councils of law, health and social at the three municipal, federal, and national levels.

Finally, while respecting the religious choice of each elderly person, the Pastoral encourages the cultivation of a spirituality, aware that an elderly person who prays can better cope with difficulties.



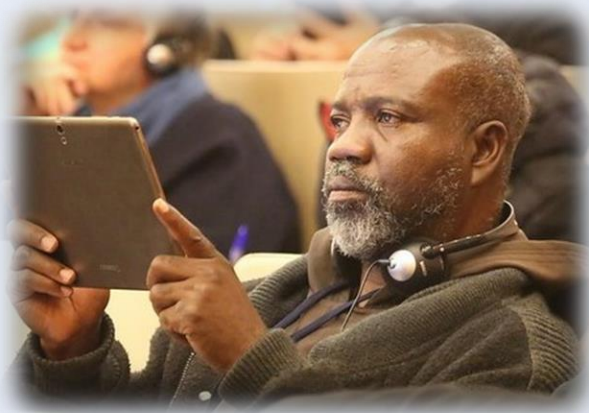
## « The elderly in Angola» (Abstract) *F. Moises Lucondo O.F.M. Cap. (Angola)*

Father Lucondo is a Capuchin in Angola. He has always been attracted by action among the elderly. After setting up a canteen for the needy in Luanda, he founded a reception center for the elderly in the diocese of Huambo, to which he gave the name of **Centre of Martyrs of Love**. The center is home to 20 residents and accommodates more than 50 people for meals.

In Angola, many elderly people find themselves alone, without support or accompaniment from family members. To remedy this situation, the government has created 17 retirement and nursing homes for the elderly across the country: by 2019, 900 seniors are being cared for there. He also decided to distribute a "meal basket," but no details

are known as to the implementation of this decision. Finally, in 2005, the government established a "National Seniors Day" (30 November) to reflect on their situation and make families aware of the need to protect them.

In concluding his speech, Father Lucondo recalled the consideration that older people are surrounded by in traditional African society, a consideration which is only a memory in Africa today. He therefore urgently requests the intervention of the Church and of African governments in the fight against violence touching the elderly.



**F. Moises Lucondo O.F.M. Cap.**

**Prof. Donatella Bramanti**



## « Family and the elderly. » (Abstract) *Prof. Donatella Bramanti (Italy)*

Ms. Bramanti gives the concept of family a very broad meaning: the family is all the generations that compose it.

The transition to old age, unlike other times of life, is done most of the time, "on tiptoe", it is characterized by a kind of disorientation that causes the person to feel more or less unable to respond to the new challenges of life. But this transition to old age is played out in the context of this intrinsically relational place that is the family, a place necessary for the well-being of individuals

and society as a whole.

Based on these interactions between family and aging person, Ms. Bramanti analyzes, how and why, transitions to old age are a positive part of the family and lead to a new balance for the benefit of both parties and society as a whole. Elderly people who have successfully made this transition invest in civic and united commitment; they find a form of social recognition that contributes to their well-being.

## « Intergenerational dialogue» (Abstract)

### *Maria Voce, President of the Focolari Movement (Italy)*

Pope Francis has highlighted the importance of the relationship between young people and adults, including the elderly, using a strong formula: "dialogue between generations is like a treasure to be preserved and nurtured" and to clarify: There is a true "alliance" between the young and the old people that can fill the "emptiness" of indifference and help young people to "face the future."

It must be noted that the Pope's call to overcome indifference and to turn a look of esteem towards one another - young people towards the elders and vice versa - beyond prejudices and clichés, has had a resounding and indicates a real sign of the times.

An atmosphere of new and unsuspected understanding is created between generations. In fact, I have found that in the face of emergencies or serious social crises, new collaborations are emerging.

It is not just a matter of stressing that older people need to think about young people or that young people need to take care of the elderly to respond in solidarity to their needs. The most beautiful and fruitful relationship is the one where they try to live together.

Life is life, on both sides, and when these lives come together, it is a surplus of life for the young and the elderly...

What do young people want? Humility, trust, mercy, patience, acceptance of others as they are, magnanimity, docility, kindness, even humor, coherence of life, authenticity, and flexibility at the same time.

Young people find in seniors a form of wisdom, solid benchmarks, and models of loyalty. And when "the future generates anxiety, insecurity, mistrust, fear," Pope Francis explains, "only the testimony of the elderly will help them to look to the horizon and upwards"

Learning to face life together, to share challenges, to strive together for a great ideal, bears many fruits.

This coexistence is based on the understanding that we are created as a gift for the other: it is a light

that gives meaning to life and opens up new horizons. Chiara Lubich says: "He who is close to me was created as a gift to me and I was created as a gift for the one who is close to me. On earth, everything is in a loving relationship with everything: everything with everything. But it is necessary to live Love in order to find the golden thread among beings."

#### ➤ **A few leads**

Breaking out of prejudices and stereotypes, dealing with the challenge of unpredictable models, to have a dynamic sharing and to live reciprocity.

#### ➤ **Conclusion**

We need a relationship of mutual love that lives between generations.

Let us not be carried away by young people who think that adults are a thing of the past, nor by adults who believe they always know how young people should behave.

It is necessary that we all climb into the same canoe and seek together a better world, under the ever-new impulse of the Holy Spirit

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## « The generation of elders, a generation to be spiritually attended» (Abstract) *Monique Bodhuin, president of LAI*



In her introduction, Monique Bodhuin explains that her only expertise comes from her status as a pensioner, grandmother, believer, and her commitment to the Church.

**The first part shows how elders can be evangelism actors:**

**1)-** The Days of the World of Retirement:(JMR) organized in 2018 by the French "Mouvement Chrétien des Retraités" (MCR) met the mission of every baptized Christian who is to work "to penetrate Christian values in the social, economic and political world." This event invited us to reflect on the excesses of our society in order to build a world more in line with God's project in the field of living together, the family, health, and ecology.

**2)-** Grandparents have to witness the "treasure of faith" with their grandchildren.

**3)-** Elders through the services rendered may be Church's presence in a neighborhood: "with the help offered, I reveal something of the face of Christ".

**The second part proposes some themes that can deepen the different dimensions of life at this last stage of earthly existence;** it is about helping to:

**1)-** To mature one's faith by going beyond memories of catechism

**2)-** Deepen the issues that fall within the new status of the entry into the ageing period: what meaning should be given to availability, gratuitousness, vulnerability, disease, suffering; how to address the issue of the end of life.

**3)-** Reflecting on the vocational spirituality of old age; it's about setting up "learning": growing aware that one is mortal, bearing the downsides of aging, shedding the superfluous, enjoying the here and now, living into hope.

**The third part refers to the notion of "Church on the way out"; it is a matter of going to the existential peripheries of our environment:**

**1)- How to reach the dechristianized elders:** existential questions can be answered in a renewed approach to faith; this may be the starting point of a journey that the Church must accompany.

**2)- Paying special attention to the very elderly :** it is a question of deploying the "service of love" by being, with these elders, creators of life: to make life live to the last breath, to put life through intergenerational actions, to help build a project of life, to help live a joyful serenity.

**The fourth part of opens perspectives :**

- "To find an understanding of faith," says Bishop Rouet, to meet real needs.
- For this mission is not an option, clerics and lay people must collaborate.
- Getting out of our traditional pastoral reflexes; implementing pastoral practices as a faith journey.
- Joining with young people: " Young people embody the strength of a people's path and elderly people invigorate this strength through their memory and wisdom " Pope Francis 16 December 2019

Conclusion : quotes from J.G. Xerri, Timothy Radcliff, Eloi Leclerc

## « The elderly: challenge and opportunity for the family» (Abstract)

### **Catherin Wiley, President of the Association of Catholic Grand-parents (Ireland)**

Helping grandparents to become aware of their vocation, to pass on faith to future generations, to keep prayer at the heart of family life, is, according to its statutes, the mission of the Association of Catholic Grandparents.

Since its inception, the Association has focused on the essential dignity of grandparents, the elderly and their God-given vocation in our families.

This vocation and wealth were expressed in the universal prayer for grandparents composed in 2008 at our request, by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. This prayer has been translated into 25 languages and Braille.

Seniors and our youth need places where they can meet. The Association, with the help of its branches around the world, initiated practical, spiritual and social activities in parish life and developed resources, for the benefit of the parish community.

We have initiated pilgrimages of grandparents, Masses of thanksgiving, days of grandparents in schools. We promoted the prayer of Pope Benedict XVI; we organize seminars, retreats, monthly meetings; we publish monthly newsletters; we

created the first medal of St. Joachim and St. Anne, with their beloved grandson, Jesus.

An "office" for grandparents and the elderly in parishes is absolutely essential. This structure can be a powerful resource within the parish. Finally we begged our Holy Father Francis to proclaim a World Day of Prayer for grandparents and the elderly in the Church.

We pray that the fruits of this conference will shed new light on the living treasures that we have among us

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## « The elderly: a challenge and an opportunity for the family» (Abstract)

### **Giovanni Paolo Ramonda, General Manager of the Pope John XXIII Association (Italy)**



The cry of the poor rises to God, and to the extent that you are one close to Him, you can no longer be far from the poor.

We want to be the parents of those who no longer have anyone, of those (who we often think) that they should not have been born because of their disability, of those who are marginalized or hospitalized beyond all measures. Father Oreste Benzi, founder of the Community of Pope John XXIII, declared that there is "an intelligence that comes only from love." Some things can only be understood out of love.

These people with whom we live, are simple people, old people, sometimes immobilized and "crucified", who want to participate, go to the summits, see the sea, feel the light breeze of the wind, go into the water, meet a smile; and, above all, need someone for whom, living with them, is not only a professional choice but also a sense of gift and belonging to the same community.

Those who separate themselves from these people by placing them in institutions deprive themselves of "experts in humanity" and hear only from afar what they should do. Medicine that puts itself at the service of slow death, even if asked, is the daughter of a culture of death.

As an ecclesial community, we must take care of the families who keep these people with them and support them with all our might.

We have to call on politicians to be the voice of those who do not have a voice and ask them to allocate resources to those who are not self-sufficient in the family for their daily needs and health care. Family law should be done by the elderly and children.

It is our responsibility: a nation exists only if it does not leave behind the weakest and refuses to accompany them to a voluntary premature death.

A society is truly human only when if it takes care of

the weak, the sick, those who suffer and if it provides the resources to families who care for the sick, sometimes even terminally ill. The scandal of privilege and waste must be removed for the benefit of this part of society, we have to be on the side of those who cannot cope on their own.

Here is what one bioethics expert, Cardinal Sgreccia, writes: "Incurability can never be considered inexorable: a person suffering from an evil considered by medicine to be incurable at present, paradoxically, is the person who has more than any other right to seek and obtain help and care, attention and continuous dedication: it is the cornerstone of the ethics of care, which has as its main beneficiaries precisely those who are in a state of vulnerability, minority, greater weakness».

As believers, men and women of good will, we have a duty to share and not to let ourselves be robbed of the precious pearls of the mystery of suffering.

We must ensure that each elderly person can spend his or her old days in their homes and with their families, by encouraging home care, financial support for education; if this is not possible, by developing foster care so that the elderly person becomes a grandfather, by reclaiming a role and the opportunity to love and feel loved. The elderly are our roots, the guardians of memory, of history, the link in the cycle of life.

## « The vocation of the elderly in the Church» (*Abstract*)

**Card. José Tolentino de Mendonça,  
Vatican Archivist and Librarian**



The Cardinal begins by putting himself at odds with the current mentality, which would like that the criteria retained to lead the adventure of faith and to go to another place, would be those that one would find in a young person: "life force, energy, openness and ability to dream ". This is not the plan of God who chose Abraham, an elder, to be the protagonist of the History of Salvation. This choice of God is rich in meaning for a reflection on the vocation of the elderly in the Church. Here are the elements of his analysis.

.../...

## 1) God asks Abraham to carry out a profound experience of faith

When Abraham leaves not knowing exactly "where is the earth to which God is sending him", he must rely on God with complete confidence in him. To leave, he must break away from all the security he has forged for himself (family environment, belonging to a citizenship) and "open up to the impact of God's surprises».

The story of Abraham is the story of an increasingly demanding trust in God; he believed in the promise of a son and God rewarded him; but God will ask him more and more, to the point of claiming the sacrifice of Isaac, his only son; Abraham climbed the mountain, "with the only hope that one way or another, in a way he did not know, God would manifest himself." Abraham's example shows us that we must put our trust in God not for the things God gives us but that we must do so "because of God himself».

Like Abraham's faith passed by the drama he lived in his heart by obeying an incomprehensible request from God, the faith of the elderly was anchored in their hearts through an experience, nourished by successes and failures, the joys and great sorrows of life, hopes and disappointments.

A beautiful image proposed by a young man from Samoa:

" The Church is a canoe, in which the elderly help to keep on course by judging the position of the stars, while the young keep rowing, imagining what waits for them ahead." To interpret the position of the stars, to look to the sky, instead of looking at ourselves and the tip of our shoes, is to go towards "the outwards, it is an exit from our fragmentary visions, a break with our perspectives":

it is the believing attitude.

## 2) Abraham lives his faith as hospitality

In the episode of Mambré's Oaks, Abraham, while no one asked for anything, runs to meet the visitors, attitude, oh so careless at the hottest time of the day in the desert! Abraham takes the initiative, serves the visitors and leaves them free; three words to characterize his attitude: "hospitality, service and gift».

The Church needs the elderly to become masters of hospitality; grandparents are already so because they know how to live, in simplicity and joy, the moments they spend with their grandchildren; these lasts see in their grandparents "the masters of a splendid and rare art: the art of being". This is the lesson got out of a game, created to help children think ethically: they choose to put the grandparents first on the list of people to be put on a lifeboat that has only seven seats while the boat sinking tells ten passengers. This "art of hospitality, which is a demanding form of love," must make grandparents a spiritual resource in the ecclesial community: the elderly are called to be "bond restorers».

## 3) Abraham becomes the father of many nations by activating the power that generates the transmission of faith

Our civilization is marked by a crisis of transmission that affects society as a whole, the family, institutions, the Church. But "transmitting consists in integrating the human being into a history," the transmission reveals to us that we are the expression of a precious heritage that transcends us; as elders we need to explain to young people where they come from so that they have confidence in themselves, in their abilities and so that they become "co-protagonists of a common history"; hence the need for an alliance between young and old, as Pope Francis said, addressing the young people of the Synod: "If there are no old people in your house, buy one, for you will need one».



# «The spirituality of the elderly and the roots of God's faithful people» (Abstract)

**F. Alexandre Awi Mello,  
Secretary of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life**

## The spirituality of the elderly.

Faced with the last stages of life and the approach of death, the elderly person becomes aware of his limitations. Aging thus becomes an opportunity to grow in hope, to strengthen love for God and neighbor, to deepen or rediscover faith.

Today, people of the third age are often still highly active, pillars of the ecclesial communities. When physical and psychological limitations arise, we will speak of the fourth age: this is when specific pastoral accompaniment is required.

## The elderly, roots of God's people

Fr. Awi Mello thus presents the vocation of the elderly: to be root, living memory, guardians, and transmitters of a heritage; this specific vocation, pastoral agents must know and encourage it.

Important in the life of a people, culture can be marked by faith. This is the situation in Latin American countries, much more so than in other countries marked by laicism or marxism. In this case, the vocation of the elderly is to transmit human values and religious values, culture, and faith at the same time. The cultural mission of the elderly is at the same time a mission of evangelization.

And the younger generations, isn't it often with the grandparents that they learn to pray?

## Popular piety and popular wisdom.

Father Awi Mello relies on the apostolic exhortation "Christ is alive" (Christus vivit), written by Pope Francis after the Roman synod on young people and aimed primarily at young people. Young people need roots; the elders can be for them roots of life that allow them not to be manipulated by the ideology of the moment and not to lose their cultural and religious backgrounds. Parents and grandparents are tasked with transmitting the living richness of the past, the cultural baggage and the beauty of faith. This is a true act of love for the new generations (Christus vivit, 178, 185). To be roots, not to remain prisoners of the past but to become able to respond to the challenges of the present.

To speak of popular piety, Father Awi Mello refers to Pope Francis (Apostolic Exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel" *Evangelii Gaudium*, 122-126) but also to Pope Paul VI in the Proclamation of the Gospel (Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 48). Popular piety, the spirituality of the people, is a true mystic. It joins the culture of all those who have a poor and simple heart, regardless of their social condition.

The break between generations is not an advantage for anyone: it is good that a wisdom of life is passed down between generations. Popular wisdom, transmitted by the ancients, enriches contemporary culture. Puebla's document, the fruit of the meeting of the Latin American bishops (1978), recognizes this wisdom for five characteristics: it has a sense of transcendence and closeness to God; it affirms human dignity; it offers Christian answers to the great questions of life; it refuses to separate mind and body, person and institution; it illuminates discernment with a kind of evangelical instinct.

Older people have a particular ability to express the popular wisdom because they themselves live a time of synthesis of their personal life, hence their responsibility to pass on this treasure.



## « Re-inventing old age» (Abstract)

**Mario Nogue,**

***National Pastoral Director for the Elderly in Chile***

The work done in Chile in the pastoral care of the elderly dates back to the 1970s; it was from this time that the first documents relating to working with elders date. Caritas Chile was the first institution to promote this work at national level.

Chile is a country where the elderly live in conditions of poverty, exclusion, abandonment, discrimination, prejudice, and violence. We are working with them to demand that the state take the necessary steps to improve these situations that violate their rights and dignity.

To think about how we can reinvent old age, we need to change our outlook, understand that ageing is part of the life cycle of human beings and that it is not something that occurs only from the age of 60; the issue of aging is something that belongs to all generations. St. John Paul II presented the elders as the guardians of collective memory; He urged us to work together, across generations, since economic value should not be the only value.

Older people act a lot in the Church. I grew up in a Church that always told me that its future depended on young people, who are especially important to our society. Today we can demonstrate that the elderly are the future of the Church. We need to appreciate all the services rendered, their availability and not just from an economic point of view. St. John Paul II proposed to create an inclusive society based on the principle of solidarity.

Older people are looking for the meaning of life: it would be interesting to work with them from the age of 60 or 65 on a new life project including solidarity and love for one's neighbor, and for an inclusive society. If old age usually sends back a negative image, it is something we need to change to reinvent old age.

Pope Francis also guides us in an interesting way when he talks about the culture of waste. This shows once again the extent to which old age is

considered in a production logic and that the contributions that older people continue to make to the rest of society are not considered.

What would be the pastoral care of the elderly in Chile?

We define it as a service developed by the Catholic Church with the help of the elderly themselves, in order to promote the recognition of their dignity as persons and their rights for their personal development and spirituality. The aim is to promote the construction of a positive social image of old age and ageing, by strengthening their active social participation as actors in their development and the recognition of their contribution to the Church, the Family, and the Society.

To this end, we are working on the following lines of action:

- We support the formation and operation of an association for the elderly, for groups of both ecclesial origin and from civil society. In this way we can develop common measures to put pressure on the State to improve the difficult living conditions of the elderly.
- Through campaigns and literary competitions for the elderly, we promote a positive image of old age and its consideration by insisting that it should be a daily exercise and not just the commemoration of a day in the year.
- We promote the education and training of older adults through our "Good Aging, Elements of Social Gerontology" training program. It is vital that older adults are concerned with knowing and understanding the issues and issues that affect them, understanding what is happening and what is happening in our society.

Pope Francis has made a strong appeal to end the "culture of rejection," in which the elderly appear to be a group abused by society. It challenges us to move forward by taking education initiatives that will give us the opportunity to think about transforming the culture of rejection into a culture of solidarity.

We generate spaces for reflection and exchange with other national and international organizations, we participate in state services in order to publicize the work done by the Church on behalf of the elderly.

In conclusion, if we want to reinvent old age, we need to change our outlook to be able to understand that older people continue to contribute to the lives of our country, our families, and our Church. "They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green," proclaiming, "The Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no wickedness in Him." (Ps 92 (91) 15-16).

Working with the elderly must be seen as an action in connection with the different pastorals that are developing in each of our dioceses.

This pastoral care of the elderly is defined as a pastoral care of communion, acceptance, listening and accompaniment. Older people will continue to bear fruit that we must value, and we must recognize their contributions to the development of a society for all ages.



## « Reinventing the time of old age » (Abstract)

**Mary M. COHEN, Archdiocese of Atlanta(USA)**

**(Text presented by Dominic Lombardi)**

"Age is a statistical category, not an identity": one may tend to regard the world of old age as a monolithic block, but in fact it is extremely diverse in its concerns, life experiences, attitudes, behaviors, beliefs and hopes.

Nevertheless, when we reach this stage of life, each of us should reflect on the meaning of his life, cultivate his relationship with the Lord and others, and seek His will for ourselves.

How can we take advantage of these years given to us to accompany, evangelize and engage in connection with our parish community, use our known or recently discovered gifts? Examples include organizing meetings, planning annual Remembrance Masses, pilgrimages, organizing

transportation for those who cannot drive, volunteering by collecting food, and celebrating birthdays. A special mention must be made to the parish services of widowhood which may be paths of continuous formation of the faith and committed disciples.

The more we are able to accompany the elderly to cultivate a dynamic spiritual life, the more we will be prepared to face the serious challenges of old age.

It is encouraging that more attention is being paid actually to the problems of older people, but more research, studies, creative initiatives and sharing of best practice are still needed.

## «We must reinvent old age» (Abstract)

**Prof. Peter Kevern, Staffordshire University (G.B.)**

The quality of a civilization is judged by the way it treats its elders. We see old age as a «grey tsunami» that threatens to overwhelm our comfortable lives. Our society is afraid because of the elderly. Our fear leaves us "infected with the virus of death." That is why we need to find a new vision of what it means to be old.

What vision of old age do we have to offer to a needy and fearful world? This period of life, we must invent it ourselves, because our societies are not prepared. I will present three ideas about the richness of our faith:

**1.- The first idea is the vision of eternal life.** In our culture, our best moments are our middle years; in old age, there is only decline, loss and finally death. This is a fundamentally pagan view of life that only brings despair. We believe that old age is just one step on the path from birth to eternal union with God. Our story is open until the end; it is open with a mission. So, when we invent old age, we must start with the question: "What is the mission of this person?"

**2.- The second idea is that «The elder is not an alien.»** We distance ourselves from the poor, the weak and the elderly because we are afraid of weakness and vulnerability. As we get older, so we may get frailer: but that makes us more human, not less human.

The Eucharistic Body of Christ is only fully realized when we acknowledge our own weakness and frailty and see in all others the light of the glory of God. It is when we care for older people that we recognize the truth about our own need. Thus, in order to "invent old age," we must learn to see ourselves clearly and truly.

**3.- The third idea is to explore what makes a true dream or vision for the future.**

"The elderly are dreamers - dreams, however, full of memory, not empty, vain, like those of certain advertisements; the dreams of the elderly are imbued with memory, and therefore fundamental for the journey of the young, because they are the roots."

We live in a society that mislead us with fantasies for a future where we get everything we want. By contrast, the Church encourages us towards a form of godly wisdom rooted in our shared memory. Like Jacob, who dreamed of a ladder reaching heaven, true dreamers are those who dream in the light of the Eternal God. We are grandfathers called to dream and to give our dream to today's young people: they need it. Because they will draw from our dreams the power to prophecy and carry out their task.

Our societies are lost. We have forgotten how to value the elderly because we have forgotten how to value anything that is not productive, or attractive, or interesting from our point of view. In our "society of rejection, » efficiency is everything.

When we take care of the needs of the elderly, we participate in a revolutionary and prophetic act. We should try to support them in their charisma as leaders and visionaries.

So, is it "Beautiful to be Old"? It is, for those with eyes to see and ears to hear. Let's take this to heart and make it our message.



## « The pastoral care of the elderly in ordinary pastoral care» (Abstract)

**Maria Elisa Petrelli ( Episcopal Conference of Argentina)**

The pastoral care of the elderly in Argentina is part of family pastoral care and, within the Argentine Episcopal Conference, its mission is to promote and encourage specific pastoral care within families: the support, care and integration of the elderly.

The national team works closely with regional and diocesan delegates. At the National Meeting, delegates from the Church Movements and Ascending Life are joined, where we transmit the missionary instructions for the year.

This pastoral work is developing in two areas: the dependent elderly and the healthy elderly; in these two areas, it is about promoting gratitude to our elders.

**1.- For the first group:** Pope Francis urges us not to abandon the elderly, echoing the concept of St. John Paul II that grandparents are a bridge between generations, in the face of the culture of rejection, emphasizing that the elderly are the living history of a people and a culture. Rejecting their wisdom makes the virus of death enter in society.

These elders are also missionaries through the pastoral care of Prayer where people kneel with the commitment to pray. Or also through the pastoral care of listening, which consists of answering alone or desperate people by telephone.

**2.- For the second group of self-sufficient elders:** We are encouraged to demonstrate the value of life and to promote their integration into the parish community so that they can become subjects and agents of evangelization.

It should be noted that the elderly of the 21st century are quite different from the elderly of the 20th century. Today, seniors do not just participate in a parish group, they leave their homes, are active and know how to use the Internet and social networks. Capabilities that are often not valued.

We need to rethink a pastoral care specific to the elderly; it is a matter of proposing values, without prejudging anyone. Among the missions they carry out, we can highlight the following:

- The accompaniment of young couples in their first years of common life.
- The integration of councils created on the basis of different family situations.
- The integration of specialized listening centers in dioceses.
- Apostolate approach through the media.

What are the challenges?

1.First of all: no one wants to recognize himself as an elderly person.

2.Secondly: "The pastoral care of the elderly" is linked to being part of a parish group to receive guidance. Most seniors in the 21st century do not want that.

3.Thirdly: the priests who believe that the majority of those who attend Mass are elderly, and therefore that no distinctive pastoral activity is required for them.

The elders are integrated into evangelization tasks in a wide variety of groups, but this does not generate a spirit of union between them. That's why we plan to create a catechism for seniors via WhatsApp by 2020. By integrating this pastoral care, the Episcopal Conference allows us to use all the means of communication at its disposal.



**Conclusions: « Towards a pastoral care of the elderly»**  
**Gabriella Gambino,**  
***Sub-secretary of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life***

What we have heard and learned in recent days about the faith of the elderly in the world confronts us with enormous cultural, pastoral and spiritual challenges.

There are places on earth where some pastoral seeds fertilize the arid terrain, there are others where extreme needs still do not find answers, huge places where the massive and silent presence of so many elderly people begins to become a silent cry. The pastoral care of the elderly is not very developed in the world, but the little we have heard can radiate by contagion. It is the desire and will of the Church to hear the cry of those who cannot be heard because they are fragile, isolated, lonely, without family, sick, discriminated and excluded, simply because they are old.

That is why, at the end of these two days, on behalf of our Dicastery, I urge you to continue these common reflections in your dioceses and in the pastoral realities from which you come. The conference ends, but a process of evangelization begins, which it is up to the local churches to implement. We laid the groundwork together, now we have to continue the work.

Thank you for your interest, for your decision to be here, for your faithful response to the call of Pope Francis to take care of the elderly.

In the international forums of the highest level as well, the urgent need for strong protection of the elderly in terms of inclusion has been put on the agenda for years to come, so that they are protected from the culture of "ageism" -

which considers aging as a devaluation - and other forms of discrimination. Correcting the negative and degrading representation of old age that dominates many societies today must be a cultural and educational commitment that involves all generations.

Life is a gift, always, and as long as we continue not to give value to old age, we will not be able to give value even to the nascent life and children, the sick and anyone who does not conform to this fictitious ideal of hedonistic and narcissistic perfection whose post-modernity and the market are imbued. It is time to act, so that those who move forward over the years can age with dignity, without fear of being reduced to counting for nothing. This is why we must change the way of acting of certain ecclesiastical circles into an attitude of listening, benevolence and discernment of the needs of those who are slowed down by the loss of their strength, but who can be a living and active part of the society.

We are the Church and, as such, we must feel challenged to intervene and invent creatively the pastoral care of the elderly. We need a pastoral care attentive to meet the diversity of needs and to improve the capacities and opportunities of everyone. This requires two inner attitudes: a strong desire of conversion of the heart to grasp the deep meaning of the value of the elderly person and an attitude of gift between generations.

.../...

There is a very beautiful commandment in the Tables of the Law, beautiful because it corresponds to the true, and it is capable of provoking a deep reflection on the meaning of our lives: "honor your father and your mother." Honor in Hebrew means "weight", "value"; honor is to recognize the value of a presence: that of those who have fathered us to life and faith. And it is not just our parents, it is also the grandparents and those who have gone before us for generations. "It is the commandment that contains a result," explains Pope Francis , "because by honoring those who have gone before us, we can extend our days and we are happy." (Dt 5.16). Achieving a full life and a fairer society for the new generations depends on the recognition of the presence and the wealth that grandparents and the elderly represent for us, in all the contexts and geographical locations of the world. And this recognition has its corollary in the respect, which as such is expressed in the welcome, the assistance and the enhancement of their qualities. Old age manifests itself as a "favorable time" where everything converges, because we can grasp the meaning of life and attain the "wisdom of the heart." But it is necessary to create the conditions for that because all of us, as elders, can mature this wisdom, that is, the "quiet force with which we

put order in what is happening in life, we preserve the past and carry the future," a kind of resolution that makes life dense, serious and precious.

It is the profound beauty of this teaching that we must pass on to the new generations, with a new and intergenerational pastoral care, which knows how to put children in dialogue, from the catechism, with the elders of their neighborhood, in the parish, in the streets and in the houses. We need to create concrete conditions for there to be a real exchange of gifts between generations. This helps us to prepare our children for a dense life of service and dialogue, so that one day they may accept the passing of the years, the weakening of their strengths and have themselves a beautiful old age.

In concrete terms, given the heterogeneity of the situation of the elderly in the hundreds of dioceses around the world, as well as the different cultural and social contexts, we can conclude by keeping in mind a few items to put on the agenda for your return home, and that we hope that you can implement according to the needs of your diocese:



1. See the great people of the elderly as part of the people of God and not just as object of charitable attention. They are a considerable part of the Catholic laicity and have special needs that we must consider. For this reason, it is necessary for dioceses to create offices dedicated to the pastoral care of the elderly.

2. *An outgoing pastoral.* The pastoral care of the elderly, like all pastoral care, should be included in the new missionary season inaugurated by Pope Francis with *Evangelii Gaudium*. This means announcing the presence of Christ to the elderly. Evangelization must aim for the spiritual growth of each age, for the call to holiness is for all, even grandparents. All the elderly have not yet met Christ and although the meeting took place, it is essential to help them rediscover the meaning of their baptism, in this special phase of life and in a triple direction: a. to find amazement at the mystery of God's love and at eternity; b. to overcome the widespread conception of a God, judge who punishes, and rather discover the relationship with the God of mercy; c. to ask the elders who are part of our communities to be actors in the new evangelization and to transmit the gospel themselves. They are called to be missionaries.

Where?

Among the elderly, the sick, the poor, children, families and spouses, through testimonies of life.

3. *Not defining* the pastoral care of the elderly as an isolated sector, but according to a cross-cutting pastoral approach. It is necessary that, in all the areas of our ecclesial commitment, we keep in mind: youth, family, secular pastoral care. In this sense, the Dicastery will welcome seniors to the World Meeting of Families and WYD.

4. *Valuating* the gifts and charisms of the elderly, in the charitable activity, in the apostolate, in the liturgy, by involving them more for example in the permanent diaconate, in the ministries of Reader and Acolyte. But also, in the liturgical services, in

the secretarial work for the parish, and as Ministers of the Eucharist.

5. *Supporting* families and being present with them when they need to care for older grandparents. Families must be at home for grandparents. It is necessary to encourage seniors to stay in their own homes with integrated forms of home care and training of health workers and volunteers to meet the needs. And support family's associations: single families cannot do so. It is necessary to foster networks between families so that they feel they can share tasks and responsibilities with other families.

For the elderly, rooting in their families is an essential factor in their well-being, in international studies it comes second only to health. And we must protect them with determination and courage from all forms of abuse and violence, psychological, physical and moral, in families as in institutions, referring to the various cases, civil but also ecclesiastical, in which abuses can be denounced without fear.

In the same way, we must promote in families an attitude of esteem towards grandparents, who can play an essential educational role in the transmission of faith, in the memory of the roots, in the testimony of the prayer. In the hyper-connected world, which is changing at a technological speed that is sometimes dehumanizing, older people are often left out. There are older people who are learning to use the internet and digital tools, but there are also many older people who no longer have the cognitive skills to do so and remain excluded. They do not have access to the virtual dynamics that surround their children and grandchildren and become silent observers of a world that tends to undo and trample on roots, memory, traditions, human and Christian values. Their role is essential to remind us of where we came from, because "man is a narrative being" who needs to "dress up in stories to keep his own life."



6. *Curbing the culture of waste.* Consider the number of elderly who apply to be admitted to an institution so as not to be a burden. In the future, the feeling of their own inequity could have even more worrying results. And in some countries, euthanasia - explicitly condemned by the Church - is already proposed for isolated elderly people, tired of living. Therefore, when people wonder if their life is still useful or of interest to someone, well, there is a void that the pastoral care of the Church must fill, there is a need for the man who cries, who seeks a hand to help him. Let's look at these voids, let us reach out to these hands with courage and love. As God the Father does with each of us, when we recognize our weakness and ask for help.

7. *Care for the spirituality of the elderly,* so that the religiosity of the elderly, alongside piety and devotional practice, can be immersed in an authentic and deep spiritual relationship with God. The aging man does not approach the end; rather he needs to draw near to God and the mystery of eternity :

1. *with the apostolate of prayer,* which all the elderly, even the sickest, can accomplish. Every sick elderly person, through prayer, can embrace the world and can change it with his strength! Even when weak, in fact, each person can become an instrument of the history of salvation.
2. *With the pastoral of the sacraments:* Reconciliation, Eucharist and Anointing of the sick, explaining better this incredible gift of the Holy Spirit, which too many people in the world confuse with a

sacrament that announces death, when instead it gives the strength to face with serenity and confidence all the difficulties of the soul and body.

3. *With spiritual dialogue:* as the years pass, the person continues to live the succession of different phases of the spiritual life, and it is necessary that we take care of his demands, the need for intimacy with Christ and the sharing of faith, which exists even in the most advanced ages of life.

Those are the few guidelines we can give you. Concrete solutions cannot come from our Dicastery, but you will treat them and make them mature in the meeting with your elders. We do not need strategies, but human relations from which networks of collaboration and solidarity can arise between dioceses, parishes, secular communities, associations and families. We need strong networks with strong roots, not fragmented and fragile initiatives, even if it is from small seeds - such as mustard seed - that the biggest projects are sometimes born.

We will accompany and support you. Let us remember, as Romano Guardini said, that old age is the age of wisdom, which is often the fruit of experience: "what is created when the absolute and the eternal enter the consciousness and illuminate life." In the weakening of his strengths, the elder, although often less active, radiates: with his wisdom, he can make the meaning of things manifest. And from this sense, a man, to remain a man, will always need it.

## Post-Congress exchanges of LAI members present in Rome

Prior to the start of the Steering Committee, LAI President Monique Bodhuin invited all the leaders and members of the association who had come to Rome to participate in the "**The Richness of Many Years of life**" Congress, to a meeting with the Executive Committee and the Steering Committee to discuss the post-congress reactions, actions to be implemented in each country and the contacts that could be established.

In the preamble, the responsables stressed with regret the lack of announcement and information relayed by the episcopal conferences in their respective countries about the Congress. Nevertheless, some LAI members noted the presence of a bishop from their country (Canada, Santo Domingo, Spain, Senegal). The Belgian episcopal conference has delegated the French-speaking National Spiritual Advisor and the Dutch-speaking President to represent it at the Congress.

All of the Congress' speeches have addressed from different angles a number of topics relating to the work undertaken with older people in different countries, the themes on which LAI leaders are invited to reflect with their groups in order to launch courses of action.

All the members of LAI expressed their happiness to have been able to participate in this congress, the satisfaction they drew from it, and affirmed that the existence of this congress, first of the name, was a sign of the times and an act of hope.

It was particularly stimulating for all to note that the Church had clearly identified the issue of the longevity of life, identified the problems associated with it, and saw this as an opportunity to act with the bishops. This congress has strengthened those who are already engaged to elders and who suffer from a lack of recognition of their work. It is thus hoped that the bishops will respond to Rome's call, follow the momentum given in Rome and that the Pope will send a letter of recommendation to the Episcopal Conferences and that it may be transmitted to the priests. It is absolutely necessary, that this reality of the elders be known and considered by the priests of parishes.

It has been widely reported, with supporting evidence, of the example of many religious movements and congregations working in the same direction. There was a need for coordination and unity in order to speak with one voice about the

situation of the elderly.

The theme of old age was taken up, stressing that it is progressive, that it is lived in stages and that it is important to help people prepare for it. Older people may need financial help, to protect themselves, as Pope Francis says, against the culture of "waste": it is fundamental to develop a culture of solidarity. This situation varies from country to country whose testimonies presented were particularly moving.

It was noted that the elderly have been spoken of as the future of the Church because their role in the transmission of the faith is so important. But their spiritual needs are great: their spirituality must continue to be nurtured. People sometimes die unaccompanied. It emerged from all the interventions that the elders, the vulnerable generation, must continue to grow spiritually; they must benefit from education from the Church, specific support at the end of life. This already exists but varies greatly depending on local situations.

In a pictorial way, the term intergenerational has resonated for some as preparation for a trip: what can we put in the luggage? Dialogue with grandchildren, dialogue with young adults, dialogue in the name of faith.

Proposals have been put forward to work in the various situations mentioned above:

- development of a specific pastoral care for the elderly in connection with other pastoral care; this pastoral care must not only make the elders the recipients but must give them a place as protagonists.
- importance of dialogue and intergenerational meetings
- intergenerational solidarity
- consistently offer seniors a specific catechism
- help seniors be aware of their "wealth" and to recognize that they can contribute a great deal to society and the Church
- recognition and definition of the active role of the elder in the Church
- need for communication training, for an access to media and computer science
- countries need links to support spirituality

A number of questions about the aging laity also arise in religious life, where different generations rub shoulders and sometimes work in isolation.

For LAI members in Rome it is necessary:

- to listen to the distress of the elderly, to face it, to respond to it by working together, is the role of the Church and of Life Ascending International
- to become aware of our differences and approaches
- to have an intergenerational relationship, perhaps from ecology

As the President said at the conclusion of the exchanges, we are a movement united in the name

of Christ. Discussions showed that many questions had been asked. We must contribute to the continuing debate. A link has been established with the Congress and as Dr. Vittorio Scelzo recalled during his visit to our members, we must continue to make progress on the Pastoral of Elders.

*Page prepared by Monika Ptak*

## **A few delegates of LAI: Belgium, Switzerland, Argentina, France and Santo-Domingo**



The full text of all the interventions, some of which are presented in this Bulletin in the form of an abstract, will be available on the website of Life Ascending International.

[www.vmi-vai-lai.org](http://www.vmi-vai-lai.org)

## Exchanges with Dr Vittorio Scelzo Director of the Office for Youth and Elders at the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life

At the end of these three days of meeting, Dr Vittorio Scelzo, Director of the Office for Youth and Elders at the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, shared a moment of exchange with us. He thanked us for our presence, the intervention of Mrs. Monique Bodhuin and the participation of Life Ascending International in the organization of the Congress.

Dr. Scelzo recalls "the richness of many years of life" with a few words heard during the congress: availability, transmission, interiority, joy, hope.

He said there are many people working tirelessly around the world for the elderly. This attention, unfortunately, does not prevent a sad observation: the elderly are sometimes subjected to financial, economic, and violence abuses, both in families and in retirement homes. LAI must be concerned about this issue of abuses, which should not, however, overshadow the dedication of a multitude of staff working in the service of seniors living in their homes or living in foster care. In the end, Dr. Scelzo insists that the ideal place for seniors is family, but it is not always possible.

Dr. Scelzo expressed his full support to Pope Francis in his attention to the elderly. He insisted on the special status of the latter's word: he is not the chief of an army! The Pope and the Dicasteries give the main orientations of pastoral care; episcopal conferences retain control of it in their jurisdiction. It is up to the laity that we are to intervene with the

bishops, in order to meet them and collaborate with them in the implementation of an apostolate of the elderly. Forming with the Pope the people of God, we must love and pray for the Holy Father so that the world sees that we are "one heart and one soul." The Holy Father exhorts us to go out, to proclaim the Gospel so that no old man dies without knowing Christ.

This congress on the pastoral care of elders provides an opportunity to build a new ecclesial culture based on the following foundations: that lay people and clerics collaborate, that lay people raise awareness of episcopal conferences, that young and old people work together. The Dicastery expects LAI to participate in the implementation of this pastoral care of elders by intervening with the Episcopal Conferences of the countries where LAI is present. That is the particularly important task that this Congress is inviting us to do.

May God want us to realize it with the help of the Holy Spirit, with the power of prayer and our sincere desire to work.

In union of prayers to the Lord with all of you.

*Account based on notes taken during the interview by Susana Zonni and members of the Executive Committee.*

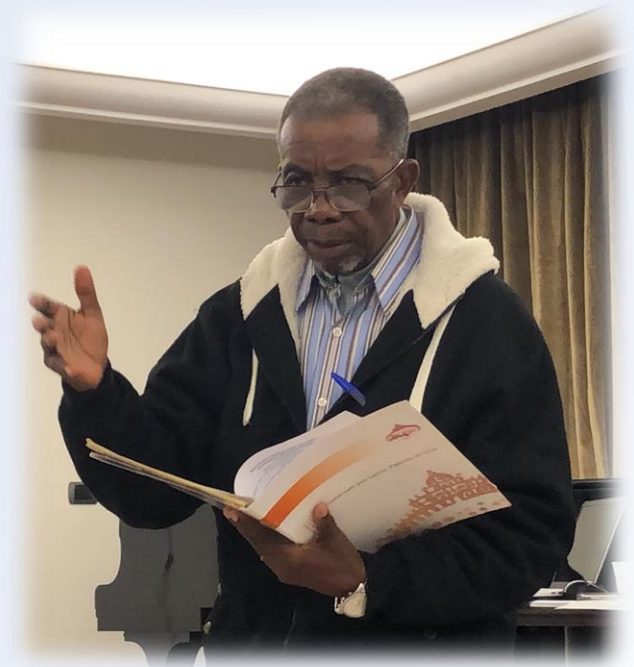
### Dr Scelzo shared our meal



## STEERING COMMITTEE FROM FEBRUARY 1 TO 3, 2020

After the congress and the meeting with LAI members was held the Steering Committee of LAI

- In addition to the usual members (members of the Executive Committee, continental representatives and spiritual advisors) were specially invited several national representatives including those from Uganda (Movement created in 2019) and the President of the Movement of the Democratic Republic of Congo (who had obtained a visa and could participate in a LAI meeting for the first time since the creation of Life Ascending in Congo in 1985) as well as the new President of Senegal's Ascending Life.
- Delegates reported their activities since the 9th International Meeting in 2018 in Santo Domingo, explaining their difficulties and plans for the coming years.
- Our Treasurer presented the Movement's financial results for the years 2018 and 2019 and the forecast for the 2020 to 2022 financial years.
- The next international meeting in 2022 has been discussed. Several countries have applied to host it: Spain, Portugal, Uganda, Tanzania. The choice will be based on logistical proposals (transportation, accommodation, translations, etc.) and financial proposals to consider our limited resources. The Executive Committee will send the "specifications" to the different countries to study the various possibilities.
- The theme of this meeting will be defined from the speeches of the Congress during the next Steering Committee in 2021. The meeting place will be set considering the one chosen for the 2022 International Meeting.



**Barthélémy Mopiti,  
President of VM RDC**



**The Executive Committee,  
representatives of Tanzania and Uganda**

## Closing message

### **Monique Bodhuin, president of LAI**

LAI members and officials in Rome on 29-30-31 January welcomed the organization of the "The richness of many years of life" Congress at the meeting that followed. This satisfaction obliges us: as Pope Francis said in his speech at the audience, it is "the beginning of a path of pastoral deepening and discernment." Let us embark on this path with the confidence and courage of the baptized who want to fulfill their mission, as the apostles were in their time. Let us be ardent promoters of this pastoral care of the elders

- working to change the way we look at old age, because "civil society needs values and meanings for the third and fourth ages"
- working to make this stage of life "a time of renewed fertility"
- by announcing to all the elderly, the

Good News, the "revolution of tenderness"

- helping older people to "deepen their knowledge of God and their intimacy with Him"
- being with the younger generations "privileged witnesses of God's faithful love". »

In this way, as elders, with them and for them, we will be the "present and tomorrow of the Church." This is a great prospect for our Movement; our commitment to LAI stems from this conviction that Christ, present among us every time we meet, engages with us and gives us the strength, joy and audacity of His Spirit.

## **Monique Bodhuin and**

## **Marta Melo Antunes, ex President of LAI**



## Presentation of the Roman Curia

### *Mgr. François Maupu, Ecclesiastical Assistant of LAI*

*Before the Congress, at the Saint Louis des Français Church, to the participants of LAI*

The term Roman Curia refers to all the organizations that assist Pope Francis in his spiritual responsibility to govern the universal Church. As the Pope is also head of state (Vatican City), there are also organizations that can manage this state: its finances and its economic activity, its security. We will limit ourselves to briefly presenting the Roman curia.

The central body of the curia is the Secretary of State. It is under the responsibility of the cardinal secretary of state, Cardinal Parolin, who is like the Pope's Prime Minister. The State Secretary has three sections:

-the General Affairs Section follows the life of churches around the world. Nearly 150 people work there.

-The section of relations with states.

-Pope Francis has created a third section in 2017 to accompany the diplomatic staff of the Holy See.

The second section is like the Department of Foreign Affairs. The other departments are congregations and councils.

The nine congregations were almost all founded in the 16th century. At their head, a cardinal; their members are cardinals and bishops who regularly find themselves in "plenaria". They can employ up to 50 people. Without naming them all, we can mention: the congregation for the doctrine of the faith, the congregation for the evangelization of peoples, the congregation for bishops.

The Second Vatican Council added pontifical councils to the 9 congregations. Pope Francis has grouped several of them into three Dicastries, including the dicastery for the family, the laity and life. Five papal councils, such as the council for the promotion of Christian unity or the council for the new evangelization.

The curia also has three courts, as well as the responsible organizations for the economy and finance, as well as a number of commissions: theological commission, biblical commission...

All the information about the curia can be found in a large book published each year, the *Annuario pontificio*, which also gives information on all the dioceses of the world in 2300 pages



# LAI in the World

## North America

French speaking Canada  
English speaking Canada

## Europe

Dutch speaking Belgium  
French speaking Belgium  
Spain  
France  
Portugal  
Rumania  
United Kingdom  
Switzerland

## America Latina

Argentine  
Bolivia  
Brazil  
Colombia  
Costa Rica  
Ecuador  
Guatemala  
Honduras  
Mexique  
Panama  
Paraguay  
Peru  
Rep. Dominicana  
Uruguay

## Africa

Benin  
Cameroon  
Ivory Coast  
Mali  
Mauritius  
Uganda  
Dem. Rep. of Congo  
Rep. Central Africa  
Senegal  
Tanzania

## Asia

Hong-Kong  
Japan  
Malaysia  
Singapore  
Taiwan

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