

**Address of Monseigneur Ramón Benito,
auxiliary bishop of Santo Domingo**

at the 9th meeting of Life Ascending International at Santo Domingo

Advances in medicine have prolonged life, leading to an increase in the number of seniors for whom society has difficulty finding a place. Pope Francis, very sensitive to this situation, says that the quality of a society is measured by the treatment that it gives to the elderly and the place it reserves for them in the common life.

This extension of life coupled with the decline of birth rate in developed countries makes this century look like the century of aging. This imbalance is the big challenge for modern society. Unfortunately, the elderly is rejected and abandoned in solitude without giving them an active role.

The elders, however, are the Reserve of wisdom of the people, a reserve used to avoid numbness of consciousness. Despite this, the elderly is abandoned and visited with minimal frequency. It's really a sin!

This situation can be illustrated by a small story in which a parent sends the grandfather to eat in his corner and in solitude because he got dirty by eating his soup. Returning the day after at home, he sees that his son is working with a piece of wood to build the table where he will have to eat alone when he'll get older. The innocence of the child represents the intact consciousness of Justice.

The tradition of the church is rooted in the proximity of the elders, so present in the Holy Scriptures. So said Ecclesiastes: *"Do not stray from the conversation of the elders, because they have learned themselves from the conversation of their parents: from them you will learn to be intelligent and to give an answer at the right time."*

Biblically, in Old Age, experience and wisdom are exalted as a blessing of God. The eldest is the venerable man, a reflection of the foretaste of eternity and the conquest of youth. Saint Thomas associates true old age independently of years and in relation to the virtue of the person.

With this look and since antiquity, the church, in the exercise of its mission, develops care centres for the weakest, including the elderly. At the other extreme, the weak is also the unborn child, for whom the church today more than ever should extend its protective action.

The consideration of the Senior In the evolution of the church

It is interesting to review the evolution of the vision of the elderly in the church in recent years, before entering into our thinking:

- In the Old Testament, the elder is symbolized by God the father, but it is also pointed out in the figure of Daniel, not for his advanced age, but for his proven wisdom.
- Pius XII mentions Saint Clément, who refers to the fulfilment of the duties of the family by paying back to the elders the homage due to them.
- John XXIII does not directly refer to the elders, although his vision of old age is implicit when he deals with the family.
- The conciliar fathers only treat the elderly in two sections (GS, 27 & 66 & AA 11)

- Paul VI invites to revalue the importance of the family to achieve the psychological and moral well-being of the individual, especially the most vulnerable, relegated in some way by a mentality that does not conform to a conception just of the man nor with the Christian spirit.

Paul VI begins with a sense of closeness and wonders about the apostolate of Life Ascending. In his message to the 4,000 delegates of the movement gathered in France, he says: *"There is no age of retirement in fulfilling the will of God, which is that we become Saints ... "*

For John Paul I the family was one of his pastoral priorities. It is within it, as a church of service and community of life, where values are transmitted, that the action of the elderly is situated.

John Paul II addressed not only the elderly, but also the international authorities, about the Christian attitude itself to this reality and the aging of humanity. The pontificate of John Paul II was definitively linked to the defence of the family and of human life (Evangelium Vitae). "The first breath is as sacred as the last sigh."

The Pontifical Council for the Laity, in the document "The dignity of the elderly person and his mission in the church" deepens the problem of the elderly and lays the foundations of the pastoral care of the elderly.

We can mention the areas that best lend themselves to the testimony and participation of elders in Church and which should not be forgotten:

1. Charity
2. Apostolate. Extraordinary area of community life
3. Liturgy. Participation in Lay Ministries
4. Participation in Associations and Movements
5. The Family, where they must pass on their values and serve as a bridge between the generations
6. By Contemplation and prayer
7. In the formation of people, in the awakening of vocation

Chapter V of the document "The Elder's Dignity and Its Mission in the Church and in the World" responds to the expectations of his participation by valuing the gift they represent as **witnesses to tradition and faith** (See: Sal 44,2, Ex 12, 26-27), **teachers of life** (see Ecl 6, 34, 8, 11-12) and **charitable agents**.

The New Catechism of the Catholic Church when he speaks of the fourth commandment (honouring his father and mother) illuminates relationships in society:

It is true that the elderly, in this last stage, are generally close to death. But if it is true that old age begins at age 59, as Canon Law and the catechism itself says, given the current longevity, **you have still 20 years of life**, which should not be defined by your limitations. and the disease.

In the year 2000 took place the Dominican Plenary Council in which all the themes of the pastoral life of the church were treated. From this Council issued a final document, which we underline the following paragraph. The **Paragraph 1.366** stipulates that " Special attention must be given to prisoners who are far from their homeland; to the sick, mainly those with AIDS; elderly people; pregnant and less protected women. (See DSD 180) ") "

The **APARECIDA Document** is a reference document in the Latin American world. From this document, which would be good if it is known worldwide, it should be noted some paragraphs that interest us:

In **Paragraph 447**, it is said "the event of the presentation in the temple (See: Lc 2: 41-50) confronts us with the meeting of the generations: the children and the elderly. The child who looks at life, in assuming and fulfilling the Law, and the elders, who celebrate with the joy of the Holy Spirit. Children and elders build the future of peoples. Children because they will continue the story, the elders because they transmit the experience and wisdom of their lives.

In **Paragraph 448**, it is said: "Respect and gratitude to seniors must be witnessed first and foremost by their own family. The word of God calls us in many ways to respect and value older people and our elders. He even invites us to learn from them with gratitude, and to accompany them in their loneliness and fragility. " Jesus' phrase, "Poor you will always have with you, and when you want, you can do them good" (See: Mc 14,7) we can understand that they are part of every family, people and nation. However, older people are often forgotten or neglected by society and even by members of their family.

Paragraph 449 declares "Many of our seniors have spent their lives for the good of their families and the community, in their place of life or work. Many are true missionary disciples of Jesus through their witness and works. They deserve to be recognized as children of God, called to share the fullness of love, and to be loved especially for the burden of their sorrows, the decreasing of their abilities or loneliness. The family should not only look at the difficulties involved in living with them or attending them. Society can not consider them a weight or a burden. It is unfortunate that in some countries there are no social policies that deal with elderly people who are retired, pensioners, sick or abandoned. So, we call for the design of just and supportive social policies that meet these needs.

Paragraph 450 declares that "the church feels committed to seeking the full human attention of all the elderly, also helping them to live in following Christ in their present state and to integrate them as much as possible into the evangelizing mission. Therefore, while appreciating the work already done by the religious and the volunteers, she wishes to renew their pastoral structures and to prepare even more people to extend this precious service of love. »

The activity of Ascending Life In the field of training could serve as an axis between countries for the creation of new agents and develop a unified global plan of empowerment and training.

The structure of the apostolate in the Dominican Republic: The National Council of the Elderly (CONAPE)

Because of its involvement in the apostolate of the elderly, we will present some aspects of the mission and organization of this council.

This Council, created by Law 352-98, is the entity responsible for the design, execution and implementation of national policies for seniors. The mission of CONAPE is to guarantee the fundamental rights of the elderly through the implementation of global public policies, a new concept of care and the promotion of a change of model towards an **Active, Productive, Participatory and protected ageing** in the Dominican Republic. Its values are solidarity, Currently, according to ONE 2010 statistics, there are approximately 1,058,000 elderly people in the Dominican Republic. The growth projections for the elderly are 20% by the year 2,050, which

is due to a moderate birth rate, accompanied by a moderate mortality as a result of the improvement in the quality of life

This growth involves a different senior, with new demands for specialized services in the areas of justice, family leadership, health, technology and political rights. For this reason, began a process of strengthening the centres of attention to the elderly in the country, the implementation of **the new model of the elderly person in the Dominican Republic**.

The priority measures for this new mission are in the following 10 points:

1. Centralize the residences for senior citizens, day-care homes and health programs for the elderly.
2. Coordinate new projects to expand care and protection services
3. Hire a network of caregivers who will, for the first time, serve the elderly in their homes for free.
4. Create instances for the receipt of older people in situations of extreme poverty.
5. Prosecutors specialized in violence against older persons.
6. Launch of three online hosting services. Info-Literacy, denunciation of abuse and Digital Republic.
7. Inclusion of the elderly In the Integral Health File (EIS), with 6 000 registered senior citizens.
8. Launch of the "SENASA" takes care of you" program to expand the home visiting network to older people
9. Creation of a model centre in Ciudad Juan Bosch, whose inauguration is close.
10. Order the process of joining the American Protection Convention Of the human rights of older people.