

Ascending Life at the service of the Church and society

The role of elders as grandparents within the family is well known for its generous dedication, spirit of sacrifice and transmission of faith and culture. The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is one of the most endearing family relationships and has been a key element in overcoming economic difficulties in the time of crisis.

Since I was appointed president of the Life Ascending movement in the Diocese of Getafe, along with my wife Amada, we have visited the Movement groups that meet periodically in the parishes of the diocese. Throughout the first year we have visited 20 groups.

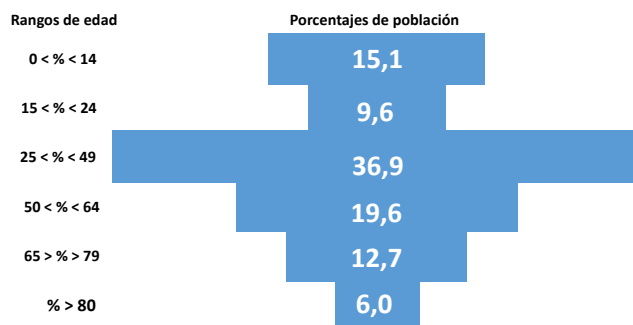
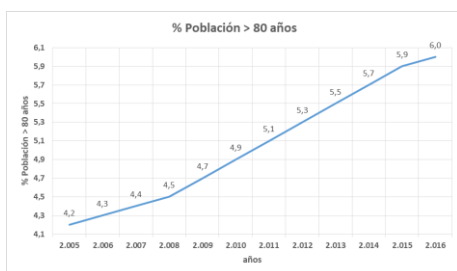
This experience has been very enriching for both of us as we have not only seen the work of the elderly, but also a clergy whose priests, affectionately and confidently embrace the groups of Vida Ascendente and orient them spiritually and in their social activity.

In their mission of accompanying the elderly, groups sometimes meet in retirement homes, accompanying their members to the last stage of life: the return to the house of the father, as our national president, Don Álvaro Medina, frequently says drawing attention to the deep meaning of our existence.

This work of accompaniment within the group extends willingly to social actions with personal collaborations within the framework of Caritas. In these contributions, we must emphasize the fidelity and constancy of the elderly in the exercise of this voluntary service, which makes them very dear to the priests and the coordinators of these groups.

Group meetings usually begin with the celebration of the Eucharist, which is followed by group meditation on Sunday readings. In this meditation, members share their spiritual experience, commenting on the difficulties of life in a friendly atmosphere reminiscent of early Christian encounters. In the visits to the residences, we were also able to accompany the priests who gave communion to the sick.

After the experience of visiting residences and social centres, trying to understand the social impact of this action, I studied European demographic statistics in an attempt to analyse our future. With the data obtained, I have drawn two graphs that I show below: on the left, is represented the evolution of the percentage of the population aged over 80 between 2005 and 2016 in Spain; on the right is the percentage of population for six age groups in Spain in 2016



<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/statistics-a-z/abc>

The perspective offered by these charts is disturbing. Over the last 10 years, the percentage of the population aged over 80 in Spain has increased by almost two points (more than 800,000 people for a population of 46 million). At the same time, because of the low birth rate, the distribution of the population is gradually shifting to a more advanced age, as shown in the graph in the form of barrel on the right side.

I worry about whether we will have the human resources to care, with the love they deserve, for our elders in a near future. Life expectancy is increasing, and the birth rate is decreasing because of two complementary phenomena: the dramatic evolution of technology in the field of medicine and the integration of man into a consumer society whose main value is work and his remuneration.

The voluntary action of the elderly, accompanying each other until the end of life, is a palliative action to this situation which must be reinforced by integrating the groups of Vida Ascendente into spiritual and sanitary environments of the residences. The elders must be accompanied so that they feel loved, focusing on the true values of existence.

It is necessary to underline here the guides published by the Life Ascending movement to encourage the training of its members in the treatment of the elderly person. As, for example, in recent years:

- Spring in the Autumn of life (Life Growing, course 2017 – 2018)
- The accompaniment of the end of life (vie Montante, Mouvement chrétien des retraités, Year 2014)
- Charisms of the Elders (Vida Ascendente, guide for meditation. Year 2001)

This troubling perspective can only be mitigated by a reinforcement of Christian values based on the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity, christian culture and a capacity for surrender and sacrifice that gives a deep meaning to the life in order to face with dignity the end of our existence on earth. We witness the presence of these values among priests, health personnel and senior volunteers.

It is only from this depth that we will be able to face a materialized and pragmatic society that is beginning to think of euthanasia as a solution. It reminds me of the terrible words of the Apocalypse when one of the Elders wonders about the crowd dressed in white robes and is answered: "These are the ones who come from the great tribulation"

Let's think constructively and strengthen the role of seniors in each of these environments:

- **The Family**, integrating grandparents into family life and strengthening the transmission of faith and culture thanks to the natural affective relationship between grandparents and grandchildren
- **The Church**, creating groups based on the three pillars of Ascending Life: Friendship, Apostolate and Spirituality. The elderly person is not alone, shares his experience and works in groups assisting the needy
- **The Society**, creating Ascending Life groups that gather in the residences and visit the disabled: *We will accompany you until the return to the house of the Father*

Jaime Tamarit