



## The challenge of synodality for the implementation of the pastoral care of the elderly

Our society is aging, changing the references that guide the lives of its members, or simply does not have any. The Holy Father Pope Francis, since the Congress of Rome in 2020, just before the pandemic, and since the catechisms dedicated to the elderly, encourages us to fight against the rejection and loneliness to which the elderly are often abandoned.

But the elderly person is not only a beneficiary of pastoral care, he can be an active actor from retirement until the arrival of physical limitations, years in which he can generate many fruits.

Following the recommendations of the Holy Father, the Spanish Episcopal Conference published a text entitled "Old age: wealth of fruits and blessings" in which the guidelines for this pastoral care of the elderly are gathered and has begun to create in its dioceses the departments of the apostolate of the elderly. This text is the result of a work carried out in a synodal manner, in which all the movements and religious congregations that care for the elderly in different facets participated (Via Ascendente, Caritas, Lares, Pastoral of Health, Confer, Pastoral of Prisons, etc. . ) Vida Ascendente actively participated in its preparation and translated it into French and English for its dissemination.

The Pastoral Care of the Elderly carries out its activity in areas where the elderly need specific support and in coordination with entities dedicated to meeting the needs of the elderly. With the guidelines of the document "**Old age as a fruit of richness and blessings**" which are the guidelines, we begin a path that will lead us to the complete development of this pastoral care.

I give as an example the meetings held in our diocese of Getafe (Madrid) in which our beloved Bishop Don Ginés, sensitive to the needs of the elderly, created the Delegation for the Pastoral Care of the Elderly. In these meetings we were able to identify priority axes for this implementation, which I present below open to sharing and new suggestions:

### 1. Reconciliation

The starting point lies in the reconciliation of the apostolate agent with himself and his own life. You must leave in peace and calm. I remember the mystical poem of Saint John of the Cross, The Dark Night, in which the soul of the poet sings: "***On a dark night... I left without being noticed, my house already quiet.***"

To do this, we use the workshop prepared by CVX (Jesuit Christian Life Community) entitled "**The Clock of Life**", which addresses a personal meditation on the stages of life until the person's reconciliation with his or her own life.

### 2. Training

Given the aging of society and the ambient materialism, we must prepare ourselves to face a new pandemic as painful as the one already suffered: loneliness. The most effective remedy to combat it is emotional spiritual accompaniment in which the dignity of the elderly person abandoned to their fate is restored. During the coordination meetings, an occupational therapist, who takes care of the elderly in a nursing home, told us: "***It is not enough to do things with the elderly... you have to love them.***" It is very simple, in the end we will be judged by love. Let us not treat the elderly like children and restore their dignity with love.



**VIE MONTANTE INTERNATIONALE**  
**VIDA ASCENDENTE INTERNACIONAL**  
**LIFE ASCENDING INTERNATIONAL**

### **3. Generational meetings**

Social networks and audiovisual media, although they represent great progress, present the duality that accompanies technology depending on its use. This technical emergence has led to a generational rupture that has given rise to new generations disconnected from tradition, with anonymous cultural references that make it difficult to transmit culture and faith. We must go out to meet the new generations who arrive equipped with a different cultural background. It is necessary to restore the spirituality of culture and the religiosity of faith. We go out to meet the new generations at the university, in residences and in the media. We train apostolate agents for this transmission in parish groups.

To foster this reconnection, a favorable path is the beauty of art, which often expresses sublime moments in music, painting and poetry. Beauty is a meeting point, since the work of art is born from the inspiration of the artist who connects with the supernatural world.

### **4. Parish meetings**

The parish is a primordial meeting place where man is comforted by the sacraments and seeks spiritual consolation. The priest is the gateway because he is the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep and knows their needs.

We address the parish priests during their archpriest meetings to offer them help in carrying out their mission, and not to burden them with additional work. The committed elderly person is an excellent catechist, helps with the work of Caritas, with liturgical preparation, creates bonds of friendship based on trust and consolation. Well trained, he brings communion to the sick isolated at home, visits them and consoles them. The active elderly person is the best remedy against the pandemic of loneliness.

### **5. Groups in retirement homes**

The elderly person who suffers the most from loneliness is the one who has been placed in a retirement home. They must be given spiritual and religious support by creating groups to accompany the chaplains who bring them the sacraments and comment on the Gospels after the Eucharist.

As I have already said, we must love the elderly. A beautiful experience was to take catechized children from a parish to visit a residence. The experience was so positive that the elders returned the visit by accompanying the children to their parish on the day of their first communion.

### **6. Cooperation with the University**

A university with a Catholic ideology is the seed of the future. For example, we heard about a training course in Supporting the Elderly at the Faculty of Psychology of the Francisco de Vitoria University. Is there a better harmony than between the University and the Apostolate of the Elderly? Let us take advantage of this harmony and work together to support the elderly, in search of suitable training.

### **7. Transversality**

The problems that affect the elderly are very diverse in nature and we must take care of them in all their facets, from loneliness to material needs, including health. Let us go together and coordinate our movements to be able to cover all the needs to the best of our ability. As an example of the need for coordinated action, the prison chaplain spoke to us about the loneliness



**VIE MONTANTE INTERNATIONALE  
VIDA ASCENDENTE INTERNACIONAL  
LIFE ASCENDING INTERNATIONAL**

of the person who comes out of prison, redeemed and older, but who no longer has anywhere to turn because his usual home is already the prison.

**8. Universality**

We are not islands, we ask the apostolate groups not to take refuge in their comfortable local environment and to share their experiences. We organize meetings at the national level and we coordinate at the international level through Vie Ascending International. In September 2023, the VMI association held its last international meeting in Madrid, which was attended by members of the movement from five continents. For its dissemination, we publish the interesting conferences given, which constitute an excellent guide for the implementation of the Apostolate of the Major in the world.

**Jesus told us: (Mark 16:15)**

**“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to all creation.”**

*Jaime Tamarit*

*Vice President of Vie Montante Internationale*

*President of Vida Ascendente Spain*