

EDITORIAL

Connecting in order to transmit

Promoting renewed pastoral care for the elderly is a priority of the Holy See. To this end, at the end of January 2020, the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life organised a Congress "The Wealth of Years" in the Vatican. Several leaders of our Crescendo network participated.

Mrs Oranne de Mautort, theologian, also participated in this Congress. She was Deputy Director of the National Service for Family and Society at the French Bishops' Conference.

In this time of pandemic, we have solicited her expertise to suggest ways of working to maintain or restore the social link with the elderly. Among other suggestions, she suggested that we take a more in-depth look at the problem of transmission¹: "listening to the voice of the elderly as a priority.... This can be achieved by encouraging older people to be passers-on of memories: "The stories of older people do a great deal of good to children and young people because they link them to the lived history of the family, the neighbourhood and the country²". How can we support them in this?"

This suggestion led us to reread the Proceedings of this Congress. We have rediscovered some very rich contributions. It is clear that there is a link between the issues of ageing, intergenerational relations and transmission. You can find them in the article opposite.

We are all aware of Pope Francis' constant concern for the elderly. He has just instituted the World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly on the fourth Sunday of July. We welcome this news with joy.

Dominique Lemau de Talancé

- 1) *Newsletter 18 (Oct 2020) Crescendo Network*
- 2) *Pope Francis 'Amoris Laetitia' no 193*

POST

Grandparents as passers-on of memories

The congress "The Wealth of Years" held at the end of January 2020 at the Vatican was rich in interesting speeches^{1 et 2} among many topics, the problems of ageing, the relationship between generations and transmission were addressed.

Donatella Bramanti, Professor of Sociology of the Family, stated that "today's elderly people are an important resource both within families and in society as a whole, because they are able to live the transition to old age in a positive way, together with the people around them. For this reason, it is important to observe closely how families perceive this phase, how they gradually approach it, what are the warning signs (if they are discernible) of this new condition.

The transition to old age is essentially a family transition, not only because it takes place within a family network, but above all because it affects all family members who are in contact with the elderly person and who gradually acquire new roles and responsibilities. Aging is a pathway, a transition that involves first of all the person/the couple, but at the same time the people with whom the older person is linked. The elderly person's family members, children, grandchildren, others within the family and, outside the family, friends and neighbours. »

- 1- *Crescendo Network website: www.reseaucrescendo.org : documents available for consultation*
- 2- *Newsletter 16 (March 2020) of the Crescendo Network*

She went on to say that Ms. Attias-Donfut (sociologist) stated that grandparents play a fundamental role in the lives of their grandchildren, as they contribute to the construction of their personal identity, constituting for them what is called the pillar identity, the backbone of their identity. And that it is crucial for a child or adolescent to experience the relationship with grandparents, because it is a different relationship from the one established with and by the parents. »

Maria Voce (Focolaris) feels that a new atmosphere of understanding is being created between the generations. She noted that, especially in the face of emergency situations or serious social crises, new collaborations, full of promise, are emerging. It is not just a matter of emphasising that older people need to think of young people or that young people need to care for older people in order to respond in solidarity to their needs. The most beautiful and fruitful relationship is the one where they try to live together.

And life is life, on both sides, and when these lives come together, it is a bonus for young and old alike.

For **Marco Impagliazzo** (Community of Sant'Egidio), if the charisma of the elderly is no longer recognised as that of wisdom, there is nevertheless a "usefulness" of the elderly person in the beauty of their witness, in tenderness, in welcome. These are the dimensions that affect the young and the very young when they meet the elderly. I have witnessed countless encounters between young and old that have mutually changed their lives. Young people discover in the elderly a personal, explicit, direct, free affectivity which moves and humanises them and which they may not find in their parents.

In the same sense, **Maria Voce** affirms that young people find in older people a form of wisdom, solid reference points and models of fidelity. And when "the future generates anxiety, insecurity, mistrust and fear", explains Pope Francis, "only the testimony of the elderly will help them to look towards the horizon and upwards". Learning to face life together, to share challenges, to aim together for a great ideal, bears many fruits.

In African culture, the elderly person had the task of transmitting the existential foundations and spiritual values of his people to the other members of the community to which they belonged. This knowledge was passed on orally to the youngest in order to maintain an identity through traditions, ways of life and culture. A wide range of traditional African societies had adopted orality, giving vital importance to the spoken word. (P. **Moisés Lucondo**, Order of Friars Minor Capuchins)

In a very beautiful meditation, **Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça** told us: "Some time ago, someone told me about a rather elementary game that is used in schools, when it comes to introducing the question of ethical choices. A ship, with its ten occupants, is sinking. The ship is equipped with a lifeboat ready to go into service, unfortunately there is not room for everyone. The lifeboat can only accommodate seven people. It is therefore urgent to determine who will board it. What a dramatic choice! Of course, the game is mainly intended to help people think ethically.



Maria Voce

Internet

I was struck by a fact that researchers notice. The younger the pupils to whom the game is offered, the more predictable the solution: if there are grandparents among the ship's passengers, they are the first to be saved. Whether they are very advanced in age or in poor health, the grandparents are first on the list. And we ask ourselves: why grandparents? What is a grandfather, a grandmother, on the path of life, when we, like seeds, are immersed in the long process of germination or beginning to receive fundamental teachings? What is their indispensable contribution? Why do the young feel so indisputably that grandparents must be saved?

Grandparents are masters of a beautiful and rare art: the art of being. Grandparents know how to turn a

normal everyday encounter into a delightful celebration.... They don't think it's a waste of time to spend time with their grandchildren. On the contrary, they know that love feeds on this free sharing. The grandparents are kind and restrained, though very talkative.... They have a wisdom that is expressed in warm stories, not concepts. They have a memory that seems inexhaustible, full of adventures, trivia and details to amuse.... Wherever they are, elders have a sense of small detail and cuddles. They don't separate, like other people, what is useful from what is useless. They offer a sure hand of affection and are always available. They can guess what their grandchildren are not saying, without being mistaken. When they are not with them, they proudly repeat to their friends what they have said. I believe that if children feel so intensely the need to save their grandparents first, if there is any danger, it is because they perceive, from an early age, that they are saved by them. This is the so-called art of hospitality, which is a demanding form of love.

The Church today needs grandparents who are grandparents not only for their grandchildren, but also in the relationship they have with everyone, especially with the youngest and most needy. That they be, in short, full-time grandparents. Grandparents are a spiritual resource that inspires and strengthens our church community on the evangelical level. In a culture such as ours, where there is a dramatic sense of orphan hood, the elderly are called to be restorers of relationships through the exercise of spiritual motherhood and fatherhood.

For **Monique Bodhuin** (Vie Montante Internationale), without proselytising, we can help grandchildren to discover "this treasure" that is faith, a treasure because it is the guarantor of what gives meaning to my life and is the price of my person, a treasure that I want to share with them, through the opportunities that daily life offers us: The beauty of a landscape during a walk, the joy shared during a family reunion, the confronting of the death of a loved one, all these situations can be a source of initiation into the presence of God in our lives.

May the opportunities for Christian teaching and our witness of life be for grandchildren the beacons on a path that leads to God: being educators and passers-on, this can be a beautiful specificity of the grandparental role. Perhaps we need to create places, forums where we can learn to make this initiation to faith, where ad hoc "tools" are offered.

It is a question of accompanying grandchildren, with the hope - a very strong hope, rooted in our being - that God, in his love for every being, will open their hearts to his presence and lead them on the path of an encounter with him.



Internet
Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça

Pope Francis, in his speech, said: "God has a people of many grandparents all over the world. Today, in the secularised societies of many countries, the current generations of parents do not, for the most part, have this Christian formation and living faith, which, on the contrary, grandparents can transmit to their grandchildren. They are the indispensable link in educating the young and the young at heart. We must become accustomed to including them in our pastoral horizons and to considering them, in a consistent 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 evangelising pastoral care, privileged witnesses of God's love. »

■ INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

In Geneva, the pandemic has limited face-to-face meetings at the Palais des Nations.

The NGO Committees on Ageing in New York, Geneva and Vienna sent regular information on the activities of both local and international NGOs to prepare the landmark meetings from October 2020 to March 2021.

The majority of the information focused on the impact of the UN Secretary

General's note of 1 May 2020 on the impact of the pandemic on the elderly.

The 45th session of the Human Rights Council (September 2020) allowed the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older people, Claudia Mahler, to present her first report on the catastrophic consequences of lockdown on the elderly. She took the floor again on 8 January 2021 at a Virtual Meeting of the International Federation of the Elderly (IFA) to warn about the frailty of isolated older people.

The 11th session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing will meet in virtual mode from 29 March to 1 April. Civil society will participate with limited representation due to limited speaking time.

On 18 March, the 1st United Nations Global Report on Ageing will be released to launch the United Nations Decade on Healthy Ageing 2021-2030.

The 46th session of the Human Rights Council is meeting virtually in Geneva between 22 February and 23 March. The subject of the Human Rights of Older People will not be discussed during this session, but at the September session.

■ NEWS OF THE CHURCH

Pope Francis has instituted the World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly on the fourth Sunday of July, as the liturgical memory of Saints Joachim and Anne, the grandparents of Jesus, approaches. For the first celebration of this day, on July 25, 2021, he will celebrate a Mass.

On February 2, 2021, the Pontifical Academy for Life and the Dicastery for the Service of Integral Human Development made public a document entitled: "Old Age: Our Future - The Condition of the Elderly after the Pandemic". A long text "on the lessons to be learned from the tragedy of the pandemic (from Covid-19), on its consequences for today and for the near future of our societies http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_academies/acdlife/documents/rc_pont-acd_life_doc_20210202_vecchiaia-nostrofuturo_en.html

■ NEWS OF MEMBERS

AIC : Helping senior citizens to go digital:

AIC, together with the NGOs accredited to ECOSOC in New York, participated in the drafting of a CIVIL SOCIETY DECLARATION for

the 59th session of the Commission for Development: "A socially just transition to sustainable development: the role of digital technology and the well-being of all".

This statement was presented to Member States at the opening session on 8 February 2021. It includes 10 proposals, the first of which is:

To guarantee Internet connection as a fundamental right and provide appropriate funding to extend high-speed Internet access and digital access to all, in rural and urban areas, for women and girls, the elderly, indigenous people, the homeless, people with disabilities and people living in poverty.

CICIAMS : In these overburdened times, the CICIAMS reminds its members of the perspective of its Patron: the Polish nurse Hanna Chrzonowska. The Blessed Hanna urged us not to forget the spiritual dimension of the human person, but also to take care of his or her physical needs.

Almost prophetically, she observed in the 1970s that sick people find themselves isolated in their homes. This is exactly what is happening now to frail older people, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Health care workers sink into depression and see nothing but their next physical task.

In these circumstances, it becomes very important to remember: "Blessed Hanna can intercede with God," concludes CICIAMS.

Little Sisters of the Poor: Even if our care homes remain on the alert and have to apply quite restrictive rules to prevent or detect cases of Covid'19, and if, in some countries affected probably later, the Little Sisters are

still in the middle of a "battle" (especially in Colombia, in the USA), the situation is gradually becoming calmer. By sharing news from the homes, photos, and video clips (to be seen on the site petitesoeurssdespauvres.org), we see a strong investment by all (Little Sisters, staff, residents) to lighten an atmosphere that could otherwise be heavy. This aims to ease the pain of limited visits, and to bring back joy and life through varied activities, (classic or original), games, artistic creations, outings to the garden, fraternal meetings and sharing, relations with families and the outside world through videos, zoom etc., celebrations and times of prayer...". To make the elderly happy," desired Jeanne Jugan. Despite the difficult context, this is still our aspiration!