

## EDITORIAL

### Pope Francis' Catecheses on Old Age

The Steering Committee of our Crescendo World Network was able to meet in September 2022, more than two years since its previous meeting. It took stock of the situation of the Network, its strengths, difficulties and limitations. It reaffirmed that it was unique in its kind: the only international network bringing together movements and congregations in the service of the social link and the pastoral care of older people. We can only continue and try to enlarge our network.

To do this, given our very limited forces, what can we do? We can build on the fruits of the Congress "The Richness of Years" of January 2020 organised by the Holy See and on the catecheses on old age that Pope Francis has given this year (February - August 2022). These very rich catecheses are an inexhaustible mine from which we can draw reflections and courses of action. This is why we have put them all on the Crescendo website: <https://www.reseaucrescendo.org>

We have decided to share with you the key ideas of these catecheses in this and the following newsletters. We hope that you will react to these readings and that you will send us details and stories related to these catecheses. These interactions are of great importance for the life of the network.

We are counting on you. Send your contributions to:  
[infos@reseau-crescendo.org](mailto:infos@reseau-crescendo.org).

We will take account of them as much as possible.

Dominique Lemau de Talancé

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## POST

### The true meaning of human life

What a joy it was for we Little Sisters of the Poor, and for the other members of Crescendo, when Pope Francis began a series of his Wednesday catecheses on the theme of old age! I would simply like to share with you some particular points that struck me from the very first catechesis. They invite us to go further, to discover the following extracts, and above all, to respond to the Pope's call: "With these catecheses on old age, I would like to encourage everyone to invest their thoughts and affections in the gifts that old age brings...".

From the outset, the Pope confronts us with the current situation regarding the world of the elderly, "a true new people", according to his own expression. A complex situation, with its risks and challenges. "There have never been so many of us in human history. (Pope Francis deliberately places himself among the elderly in a very sympathetic way). The risk of being left out is even more frequent. (...) "Along with migration, old age is among the most urgent issues that the human family is called to face at this time. It is not just a question of quantitative change, what is at stake is the unity of the ages of life; that is, the real reference point for the understanding and appreciation of human life in its entirety."

A far-reaching conviction underlies all these texts: old age is a

necessity for understanding the true meaning of human life. The Pope asks an almost provocative question: "Should the elderly ask forgiveness for their obstinacy in continuing to live at the expense of others? Alas, can we not sense this behind some of the pressures to legalise euthanasia! "Or can they be honoured for the gifts they bring to the meaning of life for all?"

The Pope does not ignore the trials of old age, and in several other catecheses he returns to them, e.g. with the figure of Job (Catechesis No. 10 - 18 May 2022). But his aim is above all to show the value, the place, the mission, even the vocation of the elderly. He does this throughout a biblical journey, based on some figures from the history of Israel. "If we do not restore to old age the dignity of a humanly dignified life, it is destined to become to degrade to a level that takes away the love of all. This challenge to humanity and civilisation requires our commitment and God's help...". Nor does he underestimate all that society is putting in place to help the elderly, but he points out, "Assistance projects, yes; but these are not projects to make them live to full capacity."

In harmony with salvation history, the Pope emphasises the notion of covenant. "Youth is very beautiful, but eternal youth is a very dangerous hallucination. Being old is just as important - and beautiful - (...) as being young. The alliance between the generations, which restores to humans all the ages of life, is our lost gift and we must regain it. It must be recovered in this culture of rejection and in this culture of productivity". This is one of the Holy Father's constant concerns! Further on (catechesis no. 2), he returns to it: "Today, the longevity of human life is greater. This gives us the opportunity to increase the covenant links between all stages of life. There is plenty of longevity, but we need to increase these covenant links."

From the very first catechesis, he appeals to our responsibility and that of the Elders themselves. "The wisdom of the long journey that accompanies old age to its end must be lived as an offering of the meaning of life, and not consumed as the inertia of its own survival. Or again, this expressive image: 'If grandparents retreat into their melancholy, young people will bend over their smartphones even more.'

And this humorous appeal at the end of Catechesis No. 3: "Today I appeal to all those who are 'of a certain age', not to say 'old'. Pay

attention, you have the responsibility to denounce the human corruption in which we live and in which this way of life of relativism continues, as if everything were allowed. Let's move forward. The world is so much in need of strong, forward-looking young people and wise old people."

Another common thread, in fact, is the extreme importance of dialogue between the generations, of mutual enrichment between old and young. This comes up in practically all the catecheses. To quote just a few passages: "The important thing is not only that the elderly occupies their rightful place of wisdom, of lived history in society, but also that there is a dialogue, that they interact with the young. ... Older people are like the roots of the tree: all their history is there, and young people are like flowers and fruits".

On 2 March, he continued: "A young person who is not linked to his roots, ie his grandparents, does not receive the strength, like the tree, of the roots and grows badly, grows ill, grows without references. This is why it is necessary to seek, as a human need, the dialogue between generations. And this dialogue is important particularly between grandparents and grandchildren, who represent the two extremes. "May God help us to find the right music for this harmonisation of the different ages: the young, the old, the adults, all together: a beautiful symphony of dialogue."

I hope that I have given you the desire to read for yourselves. Do not hesitate to react to this modest sharing, to write to us about your own experiences and reflections. To conclude, I cannot resist quoting this exhortation, based on the observation that "old age imposes slower rhythms": "It is the reform that we must make in our hearts, in the family and in society. I repeat: reform what? That the arrogance of clock time be converted into the beauty of the rhythms of life.

Excuse me for taking up your time!

Sister Guillemette, Little Sister of the Poor

**Sister Guillemette tells us: Do not hesitate to react to this modest sharing, to write us your own experiences and reflections.**

She herself gives us the example:

In his catechesis of 2 March 2022, Pope Francis invites us to participate in ". the construction of loving relationships between old and young that radiate out into the general style of living. The overlapping of generations would become a source of energy for a truly visible and liveable humanism."

On the occasion of the 2nd World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly, Agostinho, a resident of one of our houses in Madrid, received this letter from his grandchildren who live in Canada and shared it with us. Doesn't it express, in its simplicity, those "affectionate relationships between old and young", and an impalpable but real transmission?

"Our grandfather is a great grandfather. A special grandfather, because despite the distance, he makes us laugh, loves us and gives us advice. Our grandfather, even though he is far away, is close because we are like him in many ways; Mum always tells us so, and that makes us happy.

Thank you, Grandpa, because even though you are far away, you are in our hearts. Every day we talk about you, because you are always present. We love you very much.

Your grandchildren, Sofia and Diego."

## ■ INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

In April 2022, the UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing :

- Stressed the importance of advancing the implementation of concrete measures to strengthen the protection of the human rights of older persons.
- Stressed the need to take into account the global demographic trend of population ageing,
- Recognised the important role of older persons in making key contributions to social, economic and sustainable development.
- Emphasized the need to fully empower older persons to be driving forces of change
- emphasized that COVID-19 has deepened existing inequalities by exacerbating ageism, violence, neglect and abuse, as well as the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination experienced by older persons
- referred to the impact of climate change on the lives of older persons and stressed that their voices and perspectives must be taken into account in the development of policies, programmes and measures.
- stated that the current system covers the human rights of older persons only in a fragmented and inconsistent manner, both in law and in practice, and stressed the need for an international legally binding

instrument that specifically fills the existing legal gaps to fully protect their rights

- It also stressed the need to continue to improve the implementation of the existing international legal framework.

A multi-stakeholder meeting was held at the United Nations in Geneva from 29 to 30 August 2022. It provided an opportunity for civil society organisations to show strong commitment and support to the Human Rights Council in making recommendations on how to advance the human rights of older persons.

AGE Platform

## ■ NEWS OF MEMBERS

**AIC :** An AIC team from Germany in Arnsberg links young people from disadvantaged areas with people living in old people's homes;

The aim is to combat the loneliness of the elderly and to support children from disadvantaged families by helping them to feel effective, to acquire new skills, to establish reliable relationships and to feel useful.

Indeed, older people in residential care often suffer from loneliness. Staff are often overworked, living relatives often live far away and have busy schedules themselves. The elderly also suffer from no longer being able to be active anymore.

The children and adolescents we meet suffer from an environment that does not meet their basic needs, such as real hunger, but also accompaniment and support, both academic and personal.

The AIC group therefore sets up cooking workshops with the young people, where they prepare dishes together and then share them with the residents at the retirement home; this helps to develop skills and create, over time, contacts and bonds of affection that are so necessary for each of them.

**Little Sisters of the Poor:** Two events, very different from each other, have marked the life of our Congregation in recent months.

The holding of the General Chapter, held from 6 September to 15 October 2022, at the Motherhouse of La Tour Saint-Joseph (Brittany), brought together about sixty Little Sisters delegates from all the Provinces. The theme was "Impelled by the Spirit, let us advance on the path of charity and humility in the footsteps of Sister Mary of the Cross". The Chapter involved the updating of our Constitutions, studying the answers of each Little Sister from all over the world to a detailed questionnaire, and their personal or community suggestions, enlightenment brought by various religious and lay speakers, participation - for the first time - of representatives of the Jeanne Jugan Associates; these were weeks of intense work, reflection and exchanges on the present and future of the Congregation, in a climate of fervour and joyful fraternity. It is now time for the communities to become acquainted with the texts resulting from the Chapter, to assimilate them and to make them "come alive", on the spiritual, fraternal and apostolic levels. We entrust the hoped-for fruits to your prayers.

The other event was the inauguration of a monumental statue of Saint Jeanne Jugan, at the Vallée des Saints (Carnoët - 22). An initiative of the parish of Cancale, the place of her birth, it was able to take shape thanks to the commitment of many people, and in particular a "patron" couple who financed a large part of it. May this beautiful sculpture, in Breton granite, of course, according to the

project of "The Valley of the Saints", make people discover this saintly figure, and above all awaken visitors to the values and expectations of the Elderly. As the Mayor of Cancale, who took part in the celebration, recalled: "Jeanne's commitment to the neediest elderly was proof that the objective quality of a society can be appreciated by looking at the way it treats the most fragile people.

**MIAMSI** : Echoes of the 16th Latin American MIAMSI meeting:

This meeting took place in Arequipa, Peru, from 6 to 10 October 2022 and gathered about fifty delegates from Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

The theme to be developed was: Building Fraternity in the new realities of our society.

This is a topical theme for these countries, which are seeking ways and means to work for the common good, the well-being of the people and human dignity. To this end, the delegates linked their reflections to fraternity as presented in Pope Francis' encyclical "Fratelli tutti". They looked at the wonderful initiatives that promote and defend fraternity, communion and life, often in the face of situations of violence and corruption, with the common Christian hope that a world of peace is possible.

They had a moment of "immersion" in the social reality of Arequipa, a project that the members of MIAMSI have been carrying out for years in this city. This is the "Hogar de Cristo", which works for the benefit of children at social risk by developing different programmes of prevention and protection of working children. It tries to reintegrate the children into the family and the social nucleus and to raise public awareness about this problem, especially the conditions in which these children live

**VMI** : \* The second World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly was held on 24 July, an event called into being by the Holy Father; the theme for 2022 was: "In their old age they will bear fruit" (Ps 92:15); a number of countries responded to the call.

\*Vie Montante Ile Maurice celebrated its fortieth anniversary: Cardinal Piat praised the commitment of the Mauritian authorities to the service of the elderly. The October VMI monthly newsletter was dedicated to the event.

\*Monsignor Maupu, VMI Ecclesiastical Assistant, and the President visited Uganda from 9 to 18 October to acknowledge the dynamism shown so far by the Ugandan national body and to give the support of the international team to further develop the movement.

\*The Executive Committee is meeting in Madrid from 21 to 23 October to prepare the statutory events of the year 2023 - steering committee and international meeting - which will take place in Spain in Santiago; it is during this executive committee that the theme of the international meeting will be defined, from which will emerge the courses of action for the next mandate