

## EDITORIAL

### Vocation and testimonies of the elderly

This is the fourth newsletter in a row in which the main article includes extracts from Pope Francis' catecheses on old age. We feel that these texts are of great importance and deserve to be explored in greater depth and put into practice. In this issue, we invite you to reflect on the vocation of the elderly.

Francis places great emphasis on their experience with the younger generations, because "the elderly have so much to give us: it is the wisdom of life. They have so much to teach us. Dialogue between children, young people and grandparents is fundamental for society, it is fundamental for the Church, it is fundamental for the health of life".

"Giving a testimony of faith to a child means sowing this life; and giving a testimony of humanity and faith is the vocation of the elderly. Giving children the reality that they have experienced as a witness, passing on the baton. Older people are called to do this, to pass on the baton, so that they continue to carry it forward".

He also says, "Older people are the messengers of tenderness, the messengers of the wisdom of a life lived to the full".

For this to happen, they must be provided with the right living conditions and their rights must be respected.

The latest report by the Independent Expert on the effects of the current global crises notes that "older people are particularly vulnerable to climate change (among other things), which has a 'disproportionate impact' on their human rights".

The Expert "called for the adoption of a legally binding international instrument on the human rights of older persons, which would offer them greater protection" in the face of these current and future crises.

Let's keep a close eye on the reflections and decisions taken on this issue at national and international level.

Dominique Lemau de Talancé

## POST

### Vocation of the Elderly Catechesis of Pope Francis (2022)

It is good for the elderly to continue to cultivate in their person a sense of responsibility for continuing to serve, overcoming the temptation to step aside. The Lord is not rejecting them. On the contrary, he restores to them the strength to serve. The elderly who retain the attitude of healing, consolation, intercession for their brothers and sisters — be they disciples, centurions, people disturbed by evil spirits, those who are rejected — are perhaps the highest witness of the purity of the gratitude that accompanies faith. If the elderly, instead of being rejected and dismissed from the scene of events that mark a community's life, were placed at the centre of collective attention, they would be encouraged to exercise the valuable ministry of **gratitude towards God**, who forgets no one. The gratitude of elderly people for the gifts received from God during their life, as Peter's mother-in-law teaches us, restores to the community the joy of living together, and confers on the faith of the disciples the essential feature of its destination. (catechesis 14)

In the course of Jesus' discussion with Peter (John 21, 15-23), we find two passages that deal precisely with *old age and the passage of time*: the time of testimony, the time of life. The first passage is Jesus' warning to Peter: when you were young you were self-sufficient, when you will be old, you will no longer be so much the master of yourself and your life. With old age you get all these illnesses and we have to accept them as they come, don't we? We don't have the strength of youth! And *your witness*, Jesus

says, *will also be accompanied by this weakness*. You have to be a witness to Jesus even in weakness, illness and death. 15

Let us think about dialogue, about the alliance between the elderly and children, of the elderly with young people, and let us make sure that this bond is not broken. May the elderly have the joy of speaking, of expressing themselves with the young, and may the young seek out the elderly to receive the wisdom of life from them. 17

The elderly have much to give us: there is the wisdom of life. They have much to teach us. The dialogue between young people and grandparents, children and grandparents, is fundamental for society. It is fundamental for the Church; it is fundamental for the health of life. Where there is no dialogue between the young and the old, something is lacking and a generation grows up without a past, that is, without roots. 14

*The alliance* — and I am saying *alliance* — *the alliance between the elderly and children* will save the human family. A healthy future lies where children, and young people speak with the elderly. If this dialogue does not take place between the elderly and the young, the future cannot be clearly seen. This alliance between the elderly and children will save the human family. Could we please give back to children, who need to learn to be born again, the tender witness of the elderly, who possess the wisdom? 17

*Old age must bear witness* — for me this is the core, the most central aspect of old age — *old age must bear witness to children that they are a blessing*. This witness consists in their initiation — both beautiful and difficult — into the mystery of our *destination in life* that no one can annihilate, not even death. To bring the witness of faith before a child is to sow that life. To bear the witness to humanity and faith is the vocation of the elderly. To pass on to children the reality that they have lived as a witness, to bear witness. We old people are called to this, to bear witness, so that they might carry it forward. 17

Jesus says to Nicodemus that in order to “see the kingdom of God”, one needs to be “born anew” from above (Jn 3, v.3).

Old age is the condition granted to many of us in which the miracle of this new birth can be intimately assimilated and rendered credible for the human community. It does not communicate a nostalgia for birth in time, but love for our final destination. In this perspective, old age has a unique beauty — we are journeying toward the Eternal.

The elderly person moves ahead; the elderly person journeys towards the destination, towards God’s heaven; the elderly person journeys with the wisdom of lived experience. Old age, therefore, is a special time of freeing the future from the technocratic illusion of a biological and robotic survival, particularly because it opens one to the tenderness of the creative and generative womb of God. I would like to emphasize this word here — the tenderness of the elderly. This tenderness opens the door to understanding God’s tenderness. Let us not forget that God’s Spirit is closeness, compassion and tenderness. This is what God is like, he knows how to caress. And old age helps us understand this aspect of God, which is tenderness. Old age is the time of God’s tenderness that creates, creates a path for all of us. May the Holy Spirit accord us a renewal of that spiritual and cultural mission that reconciles us with new birth from above. The elderly are the messengers of the future, the elderly are the messengers of tenderness, the elderly are the messengers of the wisdom of lived experience. Let us move forward and observe the elderly. 13



Vatican news

I go and prepare a place for you (Jn 14,2)

Old age is a fitting time for the moving and joyful witness of this expectation. The elderly man and woman are waiting, waiting for an encounter. In old age the works of faith, which bring

us and others closer to the Kingdom of God, are by now beyond the power of the energy, words and impulses of youth and maturity. But precisely in this way they make the promise of the true destination of life even more transparent. And what is the true destination of life? A place at the table with God, in the world of God. It would be interesting to see whether in the local Churches there is any specific reference intended to revitalise this special ministry of waiting upon the Lord — it is a ministry, the ministry of awaiting the Lord — encouraging individual charisms and community qualities of the elderly person.

Old age is the phase in life best suited to spreading the joyful news that life is the initiation to a definitive fulfilment. The elderly are a promise, a witness of promise. And *the best is yet to come*. 16

in our old age, the importance of the many 'details' of which life is made — a caress, a smile, a gesture, an appreciated effort, an unexpected surprise, a hospitable cheerfulness, a faithful bond — becomes more acute. The essentials of life, which we hold most dear as we approach our farewell, become definitively clear to us. See: this wisdom of old age is the place of our gestation, which illuminates the lives of children, of young people, of adults, of the entire community. We, the elderly should be this for others: light for others. Our whole life appears like a seed that will have to be buried so that its flower and its fruit can be born. It will be born, along with everything else in the world. Not without labour pains, not without pain, but it will be born (cf. *Jn 16:21-23*). And the life of the risen body will be a hundred and a thousand times more alive than we have tasted on this earth. 18

Catechesis 13: 08 June 2022

Catechesis 14: 15 June 2022

Catechesis 15: 22 June 2022

Catechesis 16: 10 August 2022

Catechesis 17: 17 August 2022

Catechesis 18: 24 August 2022

## ■ INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

### **The Third Committee of the UN General Assembly debates the deleterious effects of climate change, conflict and COVID-19 on social development (AG/SHC/4372 28 SEPTEMBER 2023)**

Claudia MAHLER, Independent Expert on the promotion of the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, presented her report on the impact of climate change disasters on human rights. She pointed out that older people are particularly vulnerable to climate change, which has a "disproportionate impact" on their human rights, including the right to an adequate standard of

living, health, housing, livelihood, well-being and access to food, land, water and sanitation. She added that this impact was compounded by negative factors already affecting them, such as poverty, geographically remote location, lack of transport and disruption to care services, as well as ageism. "Older people tend to be excluded, isolated and left behind when faced with natural disasters", she summarised.

Pointing out that two-thirds of older people live in low- and middle-income countries, which are at greater risk of climate-related disasters, the expert called for urgent action by governments, UN agencies and civil society to ensure a response that takes account of their specific needs. She noted that recognition of the impacts of climate change on human rights was limited in international law, adding that while the Paris Agreement did establish a link, the "fragmented and inconsistent" coverage of older people's rights in international human rights law did not offer them full legal protection in the face of climate change. She noted, however, that the provisions of human rights treaties could be applied to some extent and that the relationship between climate change, disaster risk reduction and the human rights of older persons had been recognized in non-binding policy documents and within regional legal frameworks.

The Expert called for the human rights of older people to be taken into account before, during and after disasters caused by climate change. She recalled that while local communities and civil society had an important role to play in these rights and should be supported, preparedness and response plans were the primary

responsibility of the State, stressing in passing the essential nature of solid social protection systems, adapted housing solutions, accessible health services and effective communication systems. She also felt that the elderly should be given priority in evacuation efforts, regardless of their degree of mobility, and that humanitarian aid should be made accessible to them, particularly in terms of treatment for chronic illnesses, palliative care and mental health. She also called on States to facilitate access for older people to pensions, loans and recovery programmes.

Pointing out that older people are the fastest-growing age group in the world, the Expert called for the adoption of a legally binding international instrument on the human rights of older people, which would offer them better protection in the context of climate-related disasters.

In response to the many questions raised by the delegations, the Independent Expert noted that as older people make less use of ICTs (information and communication technologies), they need to be identified so that they can be better informed about disaster risks. She praised the merits of a legally binding instrument that would ensure that older people are not forgotten, and which could include the threat posed to them by natural disasters.

She welcomed the creation of consultative councils that represent the voice of older people in several national parliaments. However, she regretted that many countries had not yet fully embarked on this path, and urged them to include older people to a greater extent. Even countries with young societies should get on with it, because the young people of today will be the elderly of tomorrow. An approach based on disaggregated data will greatly simplify and improve these efforts, as will the sharing of experiences, she added.

Ms Mahler then returned to the notion of intersectionality, pointing out that not all older people are the same, some, for example, being women, migrants or indigenous. The Independent Expert regretted that older people are often perceived as a burden. Yet their wisdom is welcome in the face of climate change. Let's not underestimate their ideas any longer," she pleaded.

## ■ NEWS OF MEMBER

### **AIC: Intergenerational sustainable development project in Colombia**

Or how to transform plastic waste into ecological bricks for the construction of a multi-purpose hall.

Mocoa, the main town in the department of Putumayo, with a historically rural population, has seen its population completely change over the last twenty years as a result of armed conflicts and drug trafficking in the region. Thousands of people have migrated to urban centres, leading to increased unemployment, the development of informal work, the creation of shanty towns near water points, a growing sense of uprooting and cultural practices that are harmful to the environment.

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The idea of the AIC volunteers was to raise awareness among the elderly, young people, isolated mothers and their children of the need to look after 'our common home', through small everyday actions such as recycling waste.

With the help of an architect, a project was set up to build houses using ecological bricks, and the volunteers worked to raise awareness throughout the community.

What are these eco-bricks? Quite simply, they are plastic bottles completely filled with small, clean plastic waste.

Contacts have therefore been made with educational centres, schools, shops and shopping centres to encourage them to separate, store and clean all the plastic containers and waste, which will then be used to make these eco-bricks.

The filling work is carried out with elderly people from the Saint Vincent de Paul home and mothers and their children who join in these actions. It's a rewarding activity that helps the elderly to develop their fine psychomotor skills, in a friendly atmosphere.



In 2018, the ecological classroom for training and awareness-raising in environmental education and waste recycling was completed.

This ecological classroom is a place for training and raising awareness in environmental education and waste recycling. It's a great experience that gives everyone, whatever their age, the chance to contribute to improving the community's quality of life and protecting our common home.

At present, the ecological bricks stored have been used for other activities, such as garden pots and the laying out of ecological paths for walks by the elderly and frequent visitors.

It's a great experience, giving everyone, whatever their age, the chance to help improve the community's quality of life and safeguard our common home.

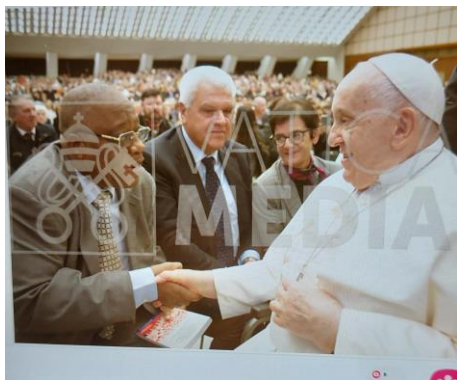
See the presentation on the AIC website: [https://www.aic-international.org/es/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/06/ASD2017-DD-AICColombia\\_ecoladrillos\\_ESP.pdf](https://www.aic-international.org/es/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/06/ASD2017-DD-AICColombia_ecoladrillos_ESP.pdf)

#### MIAMSI :

THE CRESCENDO NETWORK AND MIAMSI SHARE THE SAME OBJECTIVE OF EVANGELISING LIVING ENVIRONMENTS

On the occasion of the celebration, last October, of 60 years of recognition of our movement by the Holy See, in an article that appeared in the last edition of this newsletter, we reminded you of the extent to which our destinies are intertwined.

The aim of the Crescendo network is to work on the social links between older people and their pastoral care. Creating links and building connections is what forms the basis of our society. This commitment on the part of the Crescendo network is in harmony with MIAMSI, one of its member organisations, which works to evangelise independent communities by sharing experiences.



MIAMSI

The book published on the occasion of our 60 years of canonical existence is a collection of testimonies and reflections on our journey within the Church, punctuated by our history, our testimonies, our convictions, the commitments and hopes of those who have made and still make up MIAMSI, past and present. It is entitled "The apostolate in independent circles around the world" and has been well received by the general public and committed lay people in particular.

We had the privilege of offering it to the Holy Father, Pope Francis, on Wednesday 6 December 2023. The Holy Father encouraged us to continue the journey and to work with the younger generations. The book was also presented to the prefects of the dicasteries and other Vatican authorities who have not failed to offer us their support and prayers.

From these various meetings within the Curia, we remember a listening ear, a closeness to the Church and renewed encouragement to continue our mission.

#### Little Sisters of the Poor:

An important moment for the Congregation: on the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, during the Eucharist, each Little Sister received a copy of our renewed "Constitutions", approved by Rome. Sessions will be organised in 2024-2025 to allow us to deepen and interiorise them.

The fruit of the work of the General Chapter, which had been preceded by several months of intense reflection in all the communities, they are not "new"; the essentials are the same, and many articles are unchanged. But they have been updated, taking into account recent documents from the Magisterium and the new liturgical translation of the biblical texts. A

number of new themes have been introduced, notably ecology, which was not addressed in 1984, the date of the previous Constitutions. The pastoral dimension of our mission is emphasised and developed. Over the past 40 years, it has become clear that the new generations of older people, on every continent, often need to be re-evangelised or evangelised.

The General Chapter invited the setting up of "pastoral" teams, including, in addition to Little Sisters, Jeanne Jugan Associates, volunteers and residents who so wish.

An encouraging story was recently shared with us by "Ma Maison" in Nantes: "An elderly person from the home came to see the Mother Superior: 'Mother, we need to proclaim Jesus Christ. In addition to our pastoral work with the chaplain, can we have meetings with people who don't believe very much and who never come to Mass or only rarely? At least once or twice a week, even if it's only for 15 minutes, to share our faith with them, if they agree? From the following week, a Little Sister and the resident took charge of these meetings; the residents were very happy and came with great joy. Let's just say," adds the story with a touch of humour, "that these meetings don't last long and there's always a tasty snack at the end to keep everyone happy! But in the meantime, the word of God is proclaimed...".



Little Sisters of the Poor

A humble and beautiful illustration of what Pope Francis says in his catecheses: Old age is not a useless time when we should stand back and stop making progress, but a season when we can still bear fruit: a new mission awaits us and invites us to look to the future. [...] You must be a witness to Jesus even in weakness, in sickness and in death.