

## Intervention of Maria Francis

My name is Maria Francis. I am from India. I am a Telecom Engineer by profession, but I am also a missionary working with the youth and a core team member of Communio, which is a ministry under the Indian church that helps the church in rural areas.

I had the privilege a few years ago to live with and to accompany my grandfather who was 93 years old through a very dark phase in his life. His wife (my grandmother) had just died, and he was getting used to life without his spouse of 60 years. There were some challenges for me like rewiring my biological clock to suit his mealtimes and schedule, being alert all the time to make sure he does not fall, to be present for his needs, and balancing my Engineering job by working remotely from home. It was just him and me in the house the whole day. The Imitation of Christ says, **“The Holy Spirit is able to teach much without the noise of many words”** and this was the experience I had in those days. The daily image I saw of him praying the rosary and patiently being resigned to God’s will and not complaining filled my heart with so much light. I learnt to adapt to change from him and not to complain or blame God for things that happen outside of my control. My grandfather did not speak much but the Lord surfaced in me **a need I did not know existed** and then filled it with his own love through this elderly person. One experience I also had was living in fear thinking my grandfather would die any day like today or tomorrow or when I was away on business trips. When I was praying the rosary one day, I had a sudden realization like “My grandfather is a son of Mary, he will die only on a feast of Mary”. Then I stopped worrying and my grandfather died on a Marian feast few months later. On the day of his death, God birthed in me a new desire to serve the church in a more concrete way and hence I became a missionary. My grandfather, who had finished living his active life changed the course of my destiny and gave me the most precious gift of propagating the faith and living out my vocation as a missionary in India.

This was the foundation on which we built our campaign for the month of the elderly for Communio. Our social media team made a series of educational videos based on the Holy Father’s message for the first World Day for Grandparents and the elderly. I was happy to know that in this year message, the Pope says that: “Visiting the elderly is an act of mercy in our times” and that he proposes a revolution of tenderness. We added a series of activities for young people to perform when they watched the videos. The aim of this exercise was to uncover in young people “the

hidden need” they have for the presence of an elderly person. Some of us have dead grandparents and so we included an activity to pray for them and to visit instead an elderly priest/schoolteacher/neighbor. Fun activities like taking a selfie and posting it on social media with the hashtag #grandcelebration was organized but we also tried our best to keep these fun encounters going forward in concrete ways like make 5 visits to your grandparents (we did not stop with one visit), adopt an elderly neighbor, buy groceries for someone living alone, visit a terminally ill elderly person, offer to help in a care home, or a simple deed like make a phone call every week to an elderly person. We also included retired priests and religious living in our areas and visited them. One of the dioceses in India made arrangements for the youth to drop and pickup elderly people to the vaccination centers to get them the Covid vaccine as elderly people had no transport or logistics to get there. They also had difficulties in booking the vaccine slot as all vaccine appointments would get filled and the elderly did not know to use the website or the app quickly. The youth would book an appointment, pick up the elderly person, get them vaccinated and drop them back home. The result of the campaign was well received by the young people and many of them felt very joyful and fulfilled. This year we plan to do the same in the month of July but at a larger level as Covid restrictions are lesser.



World Day  
for Grandparents  
and the Elderly  
2022



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