



DICASTERIUM  
PRO LAICIS, FAMILIA ET VITA

## **II INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE ELDERLY**

***Jesuit General Curia - 2 October 2025***

**Introduction by His Eminence Card. Kevin Farrell**

**Your Excellencies, dear leaders in pastoral care of the elderly,**

**I warmly welcome you to this *Second International Congress on the Pastoral Care for the Elderly*. Five years ago, we held our first meeting on the theme: ‘The Richness of Many Years of Life,’ and the intuition we had at that time has been confirmed: that pastoral care dedicated to the elderly responds to a real and growing need in our communities**

**To you, who are at the forefront of this service, I offer my sincere thanks: the work you do is essential, and for our Dicastery, meeting you and listening to you is of the utmost benefit. It is you in fact, who have firsthand experience of the daily lives of the elderly, with their joys, hopes, and struggles. And it is from your experience that a pastoral ministry can arise which is not “imposed from above,” but is rooted instead in listening, and that is capable of valuing the unique contribution of the elderly to the Church and society.**

**During the pontificate of Pope Francis, pastoral attention to the world of the elderly intensified and became more systematically undertaken. With concrete gestures and constant teaching, Pope Francis placed the elderly at the center of**

**ecclesial reflection: we can recall the audiences dedicated to the elderly, the cycle of catechesis on old age—rich in human and spiritual wisdom—the establishment of the “World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly,” and the messages sent on the occasion of this event.**

**However, this is certainly not an absolute novelty; behind it lies a long ecclesial journey. St. John Paul II laid the foundations for this by calling, as early as his trip to Spain in 1982, for a pastoral approach that would value the “creative role of the elderly.” This insight was taken up and developed by the Pontifical Council for the Laity in the document, “The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and in the World” (1998), and by Pope Wojtyła himself in his moving “Letter to the Elderly” (1999). Benedict XVI continued along these lines; his visit in 2012 to the “Viva gli Anziani” family home here in Rome remains etched in our memory. Presenting himself as “an elderly person visiting his peers,” he offered a fundamental criterion: “The quality of a society is judged by how the elderly are treated. Whoever makes room for the elderly makes room for life!”**

**Going even further back, we can certainly say that our reflection on the pastoral care of the elderly has longstanding roots, roots seeded within the Second Vatican Council with the rediscovery of the Church as the ‘People of God on a journey’, the recognition of the baptismal dignity of all the faithful, and their co-responsibility in the mission and life of the Church. It is precisely the conciliar rediscovery of baptismal dignity, at every age, and in every condition of life, that naturally leads to the recognition of the leading role that the elderly can, and must play in the Church. Therefore, in order to continue the implementation of the Council, the step forward to be taken is to promote the flourishing of pastoral care for the elderly.**

**The Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life—in the wake of the conciliar constitutions *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*—aims to serve the entire People of God in a unified manner, in their different vocations and seasons of life:**

hence our commitment to families, young people, the laity, and associations of the faithful. As since today a very large and ever-growing portion of this population is made up of the elderly, we cannot ignore pastoral care dedicated to them in carrying out our mission. As Pope Francis recalled in the first congress, the elderly are the future of the Church, not just its past: their experience, deep-rooted faith, and wisdom are an invaluable treasure for the entire People of God on their journey.

The seed of the Council comes into contact today, with a new social situation: for the first time in history, we are witnessing widespread longevity. A real demographic transition is underway: the elderly are no longer a minority, but a large and growing segment of society. The data confirm this: in Europe, more than a fifth of the population is aged over 65, and in countries such as Japan, Italy, and Germany, this age-group already represents a quarter of the population. Of course, the dynamics that lead to an increase in the elderly are diverse and complex. In many contexts this is the result of widespread prosperity; elsewhere, however, it is due to other phenomena, such as the abandonment of villages, areas depopulated by migration, and economic or political crises that force young people to flee. Yet, regardless of the causes, the data is global: everywhere, the elderly population is increasing. Even in Africa, a continent with a very low average age, the overall number of elderly people is growing, and they are no longer an exception within a predominantly young population, but rather a significant presence to be valued and cared for.

The Council invited us to read the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. The lengthening of life can be considered one of these “signs” that characterize the “change of era” we are experiencing, which the Church is called to read with a ‘prophetic’ spirit and with “eyes of hope,” as the Jubilee invites us to do. And so, while many view the phenomenon of the increase in the elderly with

**concern, as if it were a burden on society, we, as a Church, recognize longevity as a gift from God. It is not an emergency to be managed, but a new opportunity. In the light of faith, a greater number of years to live should be considered a time of grace to open oneself enthusiastically to the proclamation of the Gospel, and as an enrichment for the entire community.**

**In many parishes, the elderly are not only the largest group, but often the most active. Today, in fact, the life of a retiree does not coincide with inactivity: on the contrary, it is often rich in commitments and passions. We are gathered in this Congress precisely because we feel the urgency to uncover pastoral responses appropriate to this new reality together, to share experiences and to identify suitable paths.**

**Our Dicastery is at your complete disposal to support this work. We do not intend to propose ready-made recipes—each community has its own history and specificities—but we wish to think and walk together with you, in a truly synodal spirit, to give impetus to such an essential pastoral ministry. As such, the words which the Holy Father will address to us tomorrow will certainly be a source of light and encouragement for our work.**

**I conclude by renewing my warmest welcome to each of you, and wishing you fruitful work. May the Lord guide our service to the elderly, who are a blessing for the Church, and for the whole world.**