



**DICASTERIUM
PRO LAICIS, FAMILIA ET VITA**

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Dearest friends,

I extend a heartfelt greeting to each one of you gathered here for this significant occasion. I wish to express a special and sincere gratitude to the founder of the Catholic Grandparents Association, Catherine Wiley. Dear Catherine, your tireless work and your vision have given life to a movement that has touched the hearts of countless people around the world. Your dedication to promoting the irreplaceable role of grandparents in transmitting the faith and strengthening family bonds is a gift to the Church and to society as a whole.

Today, we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Catholic Grandparents Association in a context of particular grace: the Jubilee of Hope. This Jubilee Year invites us to a profound reflection on hope as a theological virtue, that hope which, as the Apostle Paul reminds us in his Letter to the Romans, "does not disappoint" – *Spes non confundit* (Rom 5:5). It is a hope firmly rooted in the love of God, poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

And who, better than grandparents, with their rich experience of life and faith, can bear witness to this hope? They are capable of transmitting it to the new generations, in a world often marked by uncertainties, precariousness, and divisions.

Let's consider the encounter between Mary and Elizabeth, narrated in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 1:39-56). Two women, one young and the other elderly, both touched by the grace of God in an extraordinary way. Elizabeth, advanced in years, carries the precursor, John the Baptist, in her womb; Mary, very young, carries the

Savior, Jesus, within her. Their embrace is the meeting of two generations, of two hopes, of two intertwined vocations. Elizabeth recognizes Mary as the "Mother of my Lord," and the child she carries in her womb leaps for joy. It is a powerful image of the transmission of faith, of the joy that arises from the encounter between generations, of hope that is renewed.

In this spirit, our meeting today aims to be a moment of reflection and renewed commitment. The Catholic Grandparents Association is not simply an organization, but a community that embodies the mission of the Church: to be a sign of hope and unity. It is an opportunity to give thanks to God for the abundant fruits of these 25 years and to look to the future with renewed confidence, aware of the unique and precious vocation of grandparents in the Church and in society.

However, before truly beginning my talk, I want to pause for a moment with gratitude, addressing Catherine and all of you, to introduce you to the Ulma Family, of whom I have brought you a precious relic. It consists of bone fragments of all nine members of the family: Wiktorja and Josef and their seven children, killed by the Nazis on March 24, 1944, in Markowa, Poland. The six children were between 8 and 2 years old, and the seventh was still in his mother's womb.

They were beatified in 2023, and we are now awaiting their canonization. In their story, there are no grandparents, but there is still an intergenerational dialogue: two parents who educated their children in the Christian faith and who were martyred because they were hiding two Jewish families in their home. A martyrdom that also involved an unborn life, the little one Wiktorja was about to give birth to, who was partially born during his mother's martyrdom. For this reason, the beatification of this nascent life is an extraordinary event in the history of the Church, which fills our hearts with hope in the proclamation that we are all called to make of the preciousness and uniqueness of every human life, from conception. In the image of the Blessed Ulma Family, it is striking to see the halo of holiness on Wiktorja's belly. It is a real example of how faith transmitted within a family, in its natural intergenerational relationships, unites people on their journey towards Heaven.

This also applies between the elderly and their children and grandchildren. In the family, holiness manifests itself in its community aspect. We must go beyond the

individualistic conception of holiness, which is instead community, familial in this case. I would therefore like to begin reflecting with you, entrusting this moment to the intercession of the Blessed Ulma Family.

The Jubilee of Hope and the Role of grandparents

The Jubilee of Hope offers us a providential opportunity to reflect on the profound meaning of Christian hope and the crucial role grandparents can play in bearing witness to it. Pope Francis, in his illuminating catechesis on old age, has reminded us that the elderly are not mere spectators of life, but protagonists of a mission that is renewed and enriched over the years.

Hope, as Saint Paul teaches us, is not a vain illusion, but a certainty that springs from faith. Grandparents, with their wisdom, matured through the joys and challenges of life, can be living witnesses of this hope. They show us, by their very existence, that even in difficulties and challenges, it is possible to trust in God's faithfulness, in His promise of salvation. As Psalm 92 states: "In old age they will still bear fruit" (Ps 92:15). This verse, chosen as the theme for one of the World Days for Grandparents and the Elderly, reminds us that old age is not a time of decline or uselessness, but a season of extraordinary spiritual and human fruitfulness.

In a world often fragmented, torn by conflicts and divisions, grandparents are called to a special vocation: to be weavers of bonds, of unity. They represent the bridge between generations, capable of transmitting not only faith, but also those fundamental values that give meaning and fullness to life.

Let's consider how important the legacy of the ancient fathers is to the history of the Bible. There are stories of families and succeeding generations of men and women who love each other and desire to be fruitful, entrusting themselves to the Father without pretense. Their lives reveal that "the history of salvation is a divine promise of fruitfulness," fulfilled in every person, even when they are advanced in years, "so that your fruit may remain" (Jn 15:16). According to God's plan, this occurs because each person needs to be generative in order to be fully realized, giving something of themselves for something beyond themselves, for someone else.

Consider the importance of genealogies, which are lists of names expressing each person's mission and vocation. We are all fathers, mothers, and siblings. If this were not so, we would not have the life that comes to us from others.

Consider how important it is for a child or teenager to browse photos of their grandparents and ancestors. Man's life is not reduced to his personal destiny, but extends to his descendants. Even when they are weak, the elderly can become instruments of salvation history for others. This message must be passed on to new generations. We must create concrete conditions for an exchange of gifts between generations.

Co-responsibility in the Church and the Synod

A fundamental aspect of our meeting today is the reflection on the co-responsibility of grandparents in the life of the Church. In the context of the synodal journey, we are invited to rediscover the active role of every baptized person in the ecclesial mission. This also applies, and perhaps particularly so, to grandparents. They are not simply recipients of pastoral attention, but active protagonists, called to live their vocation with joy, enthusiasm, and commitment. The Catholic Grandparents Association plays a crucial role in helping grandparents discover and fully live this vocation, offering them tools, opportunities, and support to actively contribute to the life of the Church.

Co-responsibility means that grandparents should not feel marginalized, relegated to a secondary role, but at the centre of the ecclesial community, just as Elizabeth welcomed Mary, at the time when Jesus' coming into the world was being prepared. Grandparents are called to transmit the faith, to bear witness to hope, to build bonds of love, solidarity, and fraternity. As Pope Francis has reminded us, "the elderly are a blessing for society and for the Church." Their experience of life and faith is a precious treasure that enriches communities and can inspire, guide, and sustain new generations.

In this context, the synodal journey, which is now in the implementation phase, represents a precious opportunity to promote an authentic and fruitful

intergenerational dialogue. The Church, as a synodal community, must be a place where young and old walk together, side by side, sharing dreams, hopes, and projects. This dialogue, this exchange of gifts, is essential for building a more inclusive, more fraternal, stronger Church, capable of facing the challenges of our time with courage and hope. It is important to make a joint effort to foster dialogue, even in pastoral contexts, between work with young people and the elderly.

The Catholic Grandparents Association has already made a significant contribution in this regard, promoting initiatives that foster encounter, dialogue, and collaboration between generations and spreading the pastoral care of the elderly in many countries around the world. This pastoral attention today – thanks also to your work, I think of Croatia, the Philippines, the United States – is becoming increasingly widespread. Often, in our meetings with episcopal conferences around the world, your association is cited as an example of dedication to grandparents and the elderly.

Pope Francis' Catechesis on Old Age

A common thread running through Pope Francis' magisterium is his loving and caring attention to old age, seen not as a problem, but as a season of life rich in meaning, opportunity, and grace. In his catechesis dedicated to old age, Pope Francis has invited us to rediscover the priceless worth of this age, not as a time of decline and sadness, but as a moment of fullness and fruitfulness. He has reminded us that "old age is not a disease, but a privilege" and that the elderly are called to be "guardians of memory and teachers of wisdom."

These catechesis represent a precious resource, a treasure to be cherished and valued, for the Church and for society as a whole. As Pope Francis stated, "old age is the time when one can still bear fruit, the time of a new mission." This is a message that goes against the prevailing throwaway culture, which tends to marginalize the elderly, to consider them useless or irrelevant. On the contrary, Pope Francis has invited us to see in the elderly an indispensable resource for building a more just, more human, and more supportive society.

In this context, I wish to extend a warm invitation to all of you: read, deepen, meditate on, and disseminate Pope Francis' catechesis on old age. They are not only a valuable teaching for the elderly, but for the whole Church, for every Christian community. They show us how faith can illuminate and give meaning to every season of life and how the testimony of the elderly can enrich, inspire, and encourage communities. The Catholic Grandparents Association has already done much to promote and disseminate these catechesis, but there is still much to do. I therefore encourage you to continue with renewed energy on this path, bringing Pope Francis' message of hope and love to all families and all communities.

The catechesis also offer us a prophetic vision of the role of the elderly in the Church and in society. They remind us that old age is a privileged time of prayer and service. It is a time when the elderly can be, by the grace of God, "artisans of the revolution of tenderness," promoting reconciliation and unity in families and communities. This is the heart of grandparents' vocation: to be bridge builders, weavers of bonds.

The Vocation of Grandparents and the Revolution of Tenderness

Dear friends, I wish to conclude these reflections by dwelling on this unique and precious vocation of grandparents in the Church and in society. In a world often torn by conflicts, grandparents are called to be artisans of peace. For the little ones, they can be a sign and witness of love, listening, understanding, forgiveness, and care, especially for the most fragile and needy.

Tenderness is a powerful force, a force that transforms, heals, and reconciles. It is the language that overcomes every barrier, every division, every obstacle and creates communion, fraternity. Grandparents, with the wisdom matured in life, can become teachers of this tenderness. They can show us that true strength lies not in dominating, but in serving; not in possessing, but in giving; not in accumulating, but in sharing. As Pope Francis reminded us, "we have refined our humanity by caring for our neighbour" and today the elderly can be "teachers of a peaceful way of life

attentive to the weakest." And ever since his election, Pope Leo has been repeating 'We must seek together how to be a missionary Church, a Church that builds bridges, dialogue, always open to welcoming...'.

At a time when family, social, and even inter-people bonds appear frayed and fragile, the vocation of grandparents is strategic. They are called to be, by their presence, an antidote to the culture of indifference, selfishness, and loneliness, which too often characterizes our society. Their presence and their love can be a balm that heals wounds, a light that illuminates the darkness.

Our task is clear; our mission is urgent. We must promote a pastoral care that fully values the role of the elderly, that fully integrates them into the life of the Church, that values them as a resource. Let us honour this blessing with a dedicated pastoral ministry.

Being a grandparent is a fruitful honorary title that comes with a task: accompanying the flow of life through the generations and giving gifts to the young in a generative manner.

We must become grateful elders who know how to instill courage and hope in the young. We must be witnesses of faith who know how to ask for forgiveness and forgive evil in order to create a better future for the new generations. However, none of this can be improvised. It depends on us first and foremost and is built day by day from the time we are young. We should take care of our hearts, preserve our baptismal dignity, and nourish it with Christ daily.

May Mary, Mother of the Church and Mother of all the living, continue to bless and sustain the work of the Catholic Grandparents Association, and may the Blessed Ulma Family, a model of intergenerational family love, welcome, and tenderness, accompany your journey with their sweetest intercession. Thank you.

May 26, 2025