

A LETTER FROM THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCES JOINT BIOETHICS COMMITTEE

on the theme of Day for Life this year: *Caring for the Older Person.*

The focus of the Day for Life this year is older persons. The COVID pandemic highlighted the desperate plight of many older people, especially those in care homes and those struggling with long-term chronic conditions such as dementia. They carried the highest burden which included prolonged isolation, the distress for families being unable to visit, delayed medical interventions and tragic, isolated, deaths followed by shortened, minimal, funeral rites. Many family members and friends continue to bear the wound of deep grief which hurts and is still in need of healing.

There are many challenges which we face; the way in which we provide care for older persons, its cost and the means of payment, the shortage of staff in care homes, the time and energy needed to help older people feel valued and wanted. Many feel they have become a burden or can feel treated as a burden, a 'bed-blocker', or a nuisance because they move more slowly, struggle with more physical challenges and live a different rhythm of life. They often feel vulnerable and worry when they hear talk about and even concrete proposals for the legislation of assisted suicide and euthanasia. We share their concerns and in better valuing older persons need to find new ways of building bridges by our actions.

Pope Francis has recently offered a very different and more positive perspective. In his *Catechesis on Old Age*, he writes, 'The alliance between generations, which restores all ages of life to the human, is our lost gift and we have to get it back. It must be found, in this throwaway culture and in the culture of productivity.'¹ He invites us to listen to the dreams of older women and men and to learn from their wisdom (Joel 2:28). Older persons have a different rhythm to life from which we can learn. He continues, 'The arrogance of the time on the clock must be converted into the beauty of the rhythms of life.'²

We invite people to think again about the value and worth of older persons in families, in society, and to make practical choices to build bridges between the generations. We call for people and parishes to devote quality time, energy and creativity in caring for the older persons in our communities.

We invite engagement in political debate on providing adequately resourced care of the older person so that no-one feels like a burden in our society.

We challenge our politicians and healthcare system to provide accessible palliative care for all the dying.

¹ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 23 February 2022.

² Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 2 March 2022

We encourage people to learn from a closer accompaniment of the elderly that there is a real richness in the journey through old age, which offers a deeper meaning and a new rhythm to the whole of life; something which can be celebrated and lived with hope in eternal life.

St. Joachim and St Anne, pray for us.

Prayer for the Elderly

I thank You, Lord, for the comfort of Your presence: even in times of loneliness,
You are my hope and my confidence,

You have been my rock and my fortress since my youth!

I thank You for having given me a family and for having blessed me with a long life.

I thank You for moments of joy and difficulty, for the dreams that have already come true in my life and for those that are still ahead of me.

I thank You for this time of renewed fruitfulness to which You call me.

Increase, O Lord, my faith, make me a channel of your peace, teach me to embrace those who suffer more than me, to never stop dreaming and to tell of your wonders to new generations.

Protect and guide Pope Francis and the Church, that the light of the Gospel might reach the ends of the earth.

Send Your Spirit, O Lord, to renew the world, that the storm of the pandemic might be calmed, the poor consoled and wars ended.

Sustain me in weakness and help me to live life to the full in each moment that You give me, in the certainty that you are with me every day, even until the end of the age.

Amen.

(This prayer was offered for the first World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life.)