

A new intergenerational covenant

By Sister Constance Veit, lsp

Among the important issues involving the dignity of human life, abortion is of prime importance – but it is not the only pro-life issue.

As Little Sisters we are deeply concerned about the “other end” of the pro-life spectrum – the care of the sick, the elderly and the dying.

In his landmark encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II wrote, “Neglect of the elderly or their outright rejection are intolerable. Their presence in the family, or at least their closeness to the family in cases where limited living space or other reasons make this impossible, is of fundamental importance in creating a climate of mutual interaction and enriching communication between the different age-groups. It is therefore important to preserve, or to re-establish where it has been lost, a sort of ‘covenant’ between generations.”

Today our society is very far from Pope John Paul II’s vision.

Pope Francis often speaks of the “throwaway culture” to describe the neglect and abandonment of those considered useless, particularly the very young and the very old.

Francis’ concept of the throwaway culture aligns with what John Paul II termed the culture of death.

I am convinced that the scarcity of religious vocations, including vocations to our Congregation, is related to this culture of death. A decrease in the number of young women joining our community may also be related to the fact that many young people today grow up far from their elders, without roots, as Pope Francis often says.

From Little Sisters who share their vocation stories, it is evident that a close and loving relationship with grandparents or other family elders is often the spark that lights the flame of a vocation at the service of the elderly.

For several years now, the Little Sisters have also been grappling with the same workforce issues faced by other providers of senior care.

In the aftermath of the pandemic 99 percent of U.S. nursing homes and 96 percent of assisted living communities are dealing with staffing shortages.

Over 300 U.S. nursing homes closed during the pandemic and two-thirds of the remaining nursing homes are at risk of closing.

Today over 800,000 needy older adults and people with disabilities are languishing on Medicaid-funded state waiting lists without caregivers to provide needed services.

By 2030, 3.5 million new workers will be needed in long-term care services just to keep pace with our rapidly aging population.

Without dramatic changes, thousands of older adults and their families will lose access to quality care, creating fertile ground for the legalization of assisted suicide and euthanasia.

I share these frightening statistics not to be a prophet of doom but to issue a call to prayer and action!

There are many things we can do today to nurture a covenant between generations and a more caring culture.

If you are a young person, OPEN YOUR HEART to the seniors in your life, and to the possibility that God is calling you to a career or a vocation of service to the elderly.

Don't be afraid to contact the Little Sisters! Our life shared with the elderly, lived in the spirit of the Beatitudes, is a beautiful, joy-filled life!

PRAY that young people will be drawn to careers in geriatrics/gerontology ... and even better, to life-long vocations at the service of the elderly!

CREATE opportunities for intergenerational encounters and ENCOURAGE youth to explore a caring profession, or ... a priestly or religious vocation!

AFFIRM LIFE by helping the seniors you know to pursue what is most meaningful to them.

Spend time with the elders in your family; volunteer in a home for the elderly. Show esteem and support to those who work in caring professions and thank them for their service.

DEFY DEATH by voting against assisted suicide and euthanasia and by helping others to understand the inherent evil of these acts.

Support initiatives and policies in favor of increased compensation, benefits and incentives for aging services professionals.

Support immigration reform to make it easier for qualified caregivers to enter the workforce in our country.

Support reform of restrictive long-term care regulations and inadequate financing.

Two years ago Pope Francis instituted a day honoring grandparents and the elderly, to be celebrated each year on the fourth Sunday of July. It is my dream that this day will evolve to the point where the streets of our major cities are filled with families and people of all ages joyfully celebrating the covenant between generations.

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