

# *Serenity*

no. 167 Little Sisters of the Poor July 2015



The prayer of grandparents is a great gift!



### Our Mission

Continuing the work of Saint Jeanne Jugan, our MISSION is to offer the neediest elderly of every race and religion a home where they will be welcomed as Christ, cared for as family and accompanied with dignity until God calls them to himself.

**Front cover:** Resident Isabel Lugo with her great grandchildren, St. Martin's Home, Baltimore, Maryland.

**Back cover:** Official icon for the World Meeting of Families by NeilsonCarlin.com

## Serenity

JULY 2015, No. 167

Published quarterly by the  
Little Sisters of the Poor  
with ecclesiastical approval  
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Annual donation: \$5.00  
Standard Postage paid at  
Baltimore, MD



W.M.O.F. • Philadelphia

September 22 – 27, 2015

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### Online resources related to this issue

#### Catholic end of life teaching:

<http://www.adw.org/transformfear/>  
<http://www.catholicendoflife.org>  
<http://www.patientsrightscouncil.org>

#### Grandparents:

<http://www.catholicgrandparentsassociation.org>  
<http://www.grandparents.com/american-grandparents-association>  
<http://www.aarp.org/relationships/friends-family/>

#### World Meeting of Families:

<http://www.worldmeeting2015.org>



**A prophetic witness:**

*everyone is a someone*  
loved by God

**E**ach year our superior general gives us a spiritual orientation offering all the Little Sisters around the world a common focus for the coming year. As 2015 dawned Mother General Celine de la Visitation gave us a message of exceptional relevance: “We must understand how timely our apostolate still is today,” she said. “It is necessary to show respect and esteem to the elderly, being attentive to listen to them and to profit of the experience they have acquired during their lifetime. We are in an apostolic position which is very important for the Church and the world, by bearing witness to respect for the human person in his/her life and until death.”

Mother General’s words were nothing short of prophetic, for since the new year we have witnessed an unprecedented attack on the dignity of human life through a tidal wave of activism in favor of physician-assisted suicide. Since January legislation to legalize assisted suicide has been introduced in twenty U.S. states. Media coverage, which paints the right to take one’s own life in tones of compassion, dignity and personal choice, has been highly emotional and almost universal in its support for the so-called right to “death with dignity.”

Euthanasia activists are also pushing the notion that persons with advanced dementia should be deprived of food and water, even when they show a willingness to eat and are still capable of eating and drinking by mouth. They also advocate for what they call VSED, or “voluntary stop eating and drinking” by mentally competent individuals who wish to end their lives on their own terms.

The future may seem frightening for the elderly and disabled in what Pope Francis has termed our throw-away culture. As Mother General pointed out, our mission of hospitality to the elderly gives us countless opportunities to show society that there is another way. We are privileged to be able to witness that the elderly still possess an inviolable dignity and are still valuable members of society, and that as an integral part of life, death is not without meaning and beauty.

Although we are sometimes asked to voice our convictions in the public square, habitually our support for the sanctity of human life is realized in the quiet daily witness of life shared with the elderly. A college student who recently spent his spring break volunteering at our home in Denver, Colorado testifies to the powerful witness of our apostolate in an essay on what he learned during his time with us: “We are so fortunate to have the older generation around, and for them to be so eager to talk to us; and yet, far too often, we just assume that their stories are going to be a history lecture, or something we can’t relate to. Many times, however, this is not the case and the stories they wish to tell are far more relatable and inspirational than we could ever imagine them to be.”

George Weigel, perhaps the foremost Catholic writer of our day, has spent time in a number of our U.S. homes. He recently spoke at a fundraising event for our Little Sisters in Palatine, Illinois, sharing what he has learned from witnessing our apostolate firsthand. “Pope Francis often talks about the problem of a throw-away culture. What is being thrown away is not just stuff, but people.” Weigel evoked the summer of 2003, when France

Even the weakest  
and most vulnerable,  
the sick,  
the old,  
the unborn  
and the poor,  
are masterpieces  
of God's creation,  
made in his own image,  
destined to live forever,  
and deserving  
of the utmost reverence  
and respect.



#TransformFear

-Pope Francis

was struck by an unprecedented heat wave. “It was a brutally hot summer, yet thousands of French vacationers remained on holiday rather than returning home to bury their parents who had died in the heat wave, leaving them in refrigeration for sometimes two, three or four weeks. This is the throw-away culture.”

“This is the opposite of what happens at the Little Sisters’ homes,” Weigel continued. “In place of this coldness, the Little Sisters of the Poor radiate warmth, caring and love. The Little Sisters of the Poor and their guests — friends — are living reminders that there are no disposable human beings, that everyone is a someone for whom the Son of God entered the world, suffered, died and rose so that we might know both the truth of our humanity and the face of the merciful Father.”

It is humbling to reflect on these words of George Weigel — but giving such a striking witness of the dignity of the elderly





and the sacredness of all human life is precisely the mission that God has assigned us in the Church. What more prophetic and essential role could we have in the Church and the world today, given the cultural context in which we live?

During this Year of Consecrated Life Pope Francis has challenged women and men religious to "wake up the world" through the prophetic quality of their lives. The Pope asserted that prophets "receive from God the ability to scrutinize the times in which they live and to interpret events: they are like sentinels who keep watch in the night and sense the coming of the dawn (cf. Is 21:11-12). Prophets know God and they know the men and women who are their brothers and sisters," the Pope said. "Prophets tend to be on the side of the poor and the powerless, for they know that God himself is on their side."

Pope Francis suggested that consecrated persons “create ‘alternating spaces’ where the Gospel approach of self-giving, fraternity, embracing differences, and love of one another can thrive.” As Little Sisters it is our profound joy to respond to the signs of the times as they relate to our mission by doing all we can to protect our elder brothers and sisters from the threats of the Culture of Death. In our own humble way we want to wake up the world to the awesome reality “that everyone is a someone for whom the Son of God entered the world, suffered, died and rose.”

Although we cannot discount the influence of the advocates of death on demand, we are, nevertheless, encouraged by signs of hope in our midst — persons like George Weigel and the young man who volunteered in Denver, the many individuals who collaborate with us and contribute to our work, the witness of families who know how to surround their elders with love and tenderness — and the fact that of the twenty states where assisted suicide legislation was introduced this year, to date nine of them have either defeated or tabled these initiatives. In addition, a recent Marist poll sponsored by the Knights of Columbus revealed that despite a positive push in the media, 61% of Americans do not currently support the legalization of physician-assisted suicide. At the same time, two-thirds of those polled are concerned that the elderly in nursing homes are at risk, and that fewer end-of-life options will be available in the future.

Clearly we have our work cut out for us! Please join us in witnessing to the world that every person is created in God’s image and thus possesses inestimable beauty and worth, regardless of their abilities or usefulness.

In preparation for the upcoming World Meeting of Families, we hope on the following pages to wake up the world to the invaluable role of grandparents in the family and society. This issue of *Serenity* also includes a reflection on Cardinal Francis George, a great friend of our homes in Chicago, an authentic witness to the redemptive value of suffering and a heroic defender of the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death. 🌿



Not yet time to “pull in the oars”:

*Old age is a true vocation*

Pope Francis on  
the role of the elderly in the family



## Audience of March 4, 2015: The current situation of the elderly

Today's catechesis and next Wednesday's will be dedicated to the elderly, who in the family are the grandparents, aunts and uncles. Today we will reflect on the current problematic condition of the elderly, and next time, that is, next Wednesday, on a more positive note, on the vocation pertaining to this stage of life.

Thanks to the progress of medicine life-spans have increased: but society has not "expanded" to life! The number of elderly has multiplied, but our societies are not organized well enough to make room for them, with proper respect and practical consideration for their frailty and their dignity. While we are young, we are led to ignore old age, as if it were a disease to keep away from; then when we become old, especially if we are poor, if we are sick and alone, we experience the shortcomings of a society programmed for efficiency, which consequently ignores its elderly. And the elderly are a wealth not to be ignored.

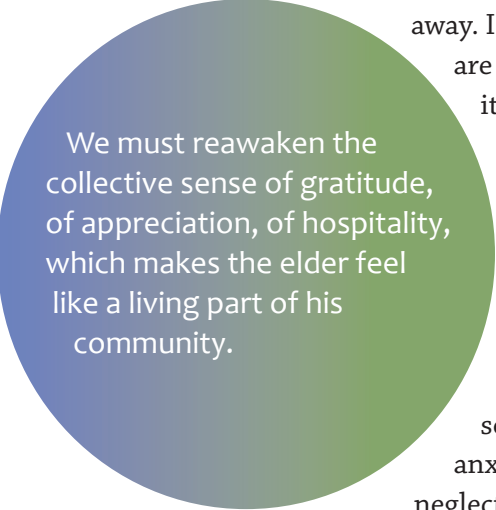
Benedict XVI, visiting a home for the elderly, used clear and prophetic words, saying in this way: "The quality of a society, I mean of a civilization, is also judged by how it treats elderly people and by the place it gives them in community life" (November 12, 2012). It's true, attention to the elderly makes the difference in a civilization. Is there attention to the elderly in a civilization? Is there room for the elderly? This civilization will move forward if it knows how to respect wisdom, the wisdom of the elderly. In a civilization in which there is no room for the elderly or where

In preparation for the upcoming World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia this September, Pope Francis has been devoting his weekly catecheses to issues concerning the family. On two occasions in March he spoke about the problems faced by the elderly and their role in the family. We reprint these two talks in their entirety.

they are thrown away because they create problems, this society carries with it the virus of death.

In the West, scientists present the current century as the aging century: children are diminishing, the elderly are increasing. This imbalance challenges us, indeed, it is a great challenge for contemporary society. Yet a culture of profit insists on casting off the old like a “weight.” Not only do they not produce — this culture thinks — but they are a burden: in short, what is the outcome of thinking like this? They are thrown

away. It’s brutal to see how the elderly are thrown away, it is a brutal thing, it is a sin! No one dares to say it openly, but it’s done! There is something vile in this adherence to the throw-away culture. But we are accustomed to throwing people away. We want to remove our growing fear of weakness and vulnerability; but by doing so we increase in the elderly the anxiety of being poorly tolerated and neglected.



We must reawaken the collective sense of gratitude, of appreciation, of hospitality, which makes the elder feel like a living part of his community.

During my ministry in Buenos Aires

I was in direct contact with this reality and its problems: “The elderly are abandoned, and not only in material instability. They are abandoned out of a selfish incapacity to accept their limitations that reflect our own limitations, because of the numerous difficulties that must be overcome in order to survive in a society that does not allow them to participate, to have their say, or be referents in the consumer model of ‘only the young can be useful and enjoy.’ These elderly persons throughout society ought to be a reservoir of wisdom for our people. The elderly are the reservoir of wisdom for our people! How easily the conscience falls dormant when there is no love!” (Solo l’amore ci può salvare, Vatican City, 2013, p. 83).



And it happens like that. I remember, when I was visiting a retirement home, I spoke with each person and I frequently heard this: “How are you? And your children? Well, well. How many do you have? Many. And do they come to visit you? Oh sure, yes, always, yes, they come. When was the last time they came?” I remember an elderly woman who said to me: “Mmm, for Christmas.” It was August! Eight months without being visited by her children — abandoned for eight months! This is called mortal sin, understand? Once as a child, a grandmother told us the story of an old grandfather who got dirty while eating because he couldn’t easily bring the spoonful of soup to his mouth. And his son, that is, the father of the family, had decided to move him from the dinner table and set up a little table in the kitchen to eat alone, so he couldn’t be seen. In this way he wouldn’t make a bad impression when friends came over to lunch or dinner. A few days later, he came home and found his youngest child playing with some wood and a hammer and nails, he was making something there. He said: “What are you making?”

— I'm making a table, papa. — A table, why? — To have one for when you grow old, so that you can eat there." Children are more aware than we are!

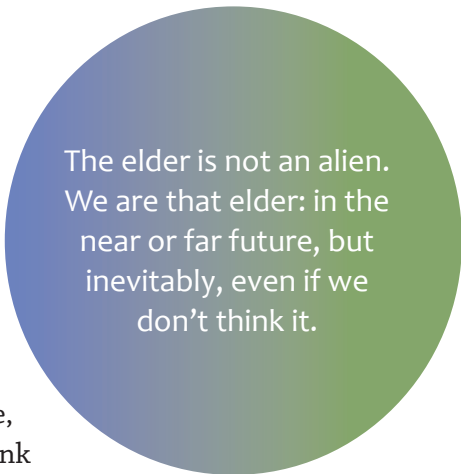
In the tradition of the Church there is a wealth of wisdom that has always supported a culture of closeness to the elderly, a disposition of warm and supportive companionship in this final phase of life. This tradition is rooted in Sacred Scripture, as these passages from the Book of Sirach attest: "Do not disregard the discourse of the aged, for they themselves learned from their fathers; because from them you will gain understanding and learn how to give an answer in time of need" (Sir 8:9).

The Church cannot and does not want to conform to a mentality of impatience, and much less of indifference and contempt, towards old age. We must reawaken the collective sense of gratitude, of appreciation, of hospitality, which makes the elder feel like a living part of his community.





Our elders are men and women, fathers and mothers, who came before us on our own road, in our own house, in our daily battle for a worthy life. They are men and women from whom we have received so much. The elder is not an alien. We are that elder: in the near or far future, but inevitably, even if we don't think it. And if we don't learn how to treat the elder better, that is how we will be treated.



The elder is not an alien. We are that elder: in the near or far future, but inevitably, even if we don't think it.

We old people are all a little fragile. Some, however, are particularly weak, many are alone, and stricken by illness. Some depend on the indispensable care and attention of others. Are we going to take a step back? Abandon them to their fate? A society without proximity, where gratuity and affection without compensation — between strangers as well — is disappearing, is a perverse society. The Church, faithful to the Word of God, cannot tolerate such degeneration. A Christian community in which proximity and gratuity are no longer considered indispensable is a society which would lose her soul. Where there is no honor for elders, there is no future for the young.

## Audience of March 11, 2015: Old age is a true vocation from the Lord

**I**n today's catechesis we continue our reflection on grandparents, considering the value and importance of their role in the family. I do so by placing myself in their shoes, because I too belong to this age group.

When I was in the Philippines, the Filipino people greeted me saying “Lolo Kiko” — meaning Grandpa Francis — “Lolo Kiko,” they said! The first important thing to stress: it is true that

society tends to discard us, but the Lord definitely does not! The Lord never discards us. He calls us to follow him in every age of life, and old age has a grace and a mission too, a true vocation from the Lord. Old age is a vocation. It is not yet time to “pull in the oars.” This period of life is different from those before, there is no doubt; we even have to somewhat “invent it ourselves,” because our societies are not ready, spiritually and morally, to appreciate the true value of this stage of life. Indeed, it once was not so normal to have time available; it is much more so today. Christian spirituality has also been caught somewhat by surprise, with regard to outlining a kind of spirituality of the elderly. But thanks be to God there is no shortage of the testimony of elderly saints, both men and women!

I was really moved by the “Day Dedicated to the Elderly” that we had here in St. Peter’s Square last year, the Square was full. I listened to the stories of elderly people who devote themselves to others, and to stories of married couples, who said: “We are celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, we are celebrating our 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.” It is important to present this to young people who tire so easily — the testimony of the elderly in fidelity is important.

There were so many in this Square that day. It is a reflection to continue, in both the ecclesial and civil spheres. The Gospel comes to meet us with a really moving and encouraging image. It is the image of Simeon and Anna, whom are spoken of in the Gospel of Jesus’ childhood, composed by St. Luke. There were certainly elderly, the “old man,” Simeon, and the “prophetess,” Anna, who was 84 years old. This woman did not hide her age. The Gospel says that they awaited the coming of God every day, with great trust, for many years. They truly wanted to see him that day, to grasp the signs, to understand the origin. By then, they were also perhaps more resigned to die first. That long wait, however, continued to occupy their whole life, they had no commitments more important than this: to await the Lord and pray. So, when Mary and Joseph went to the Temple to fulfil the



The Lord  
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provisions of the Law, Simeon and Anna moved quickly, inspired by the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 2:27). The burden of age and waiting disappeared in an instant. They recognized the Child, and discovered new strength, for a new task: to give thanks for and bear witness to this Sign from God. Simeon

improvised a beautiful hymn of jubilation (cf. Lk 2:29-32) — in that moment

he was a poet — and Anna became the first woman to preach of Jesus: she “spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Lk 2:38).

Dear grandparents, dear elderly, let us follow in the footsteps of these extraordinary elders! Let us too become like poets of prayer: let us develop a taste for finding our own words, let us once again grasp those which teach us the Word of God. The prayer of grandparents and of the elderly is a great gift for the Church! The prayer of grandparents and of the elderly is a great



We are able to remind ambitious young people that a life without love is a barren life.... We are able to teach the young who are overly self-absorbed that there is more joy in giving than in receiving.

gift for the Church, it is a treasure! A great injection of wisdom for the whole of human society: above all for one which is too busy, too taken, too distracted. Someone should also sing, for them too, sing of the signs of God, proclaim the signs of God, pray for them! Let us look to Benedict


XVI, who chose to spend the final span of his life in prayer and listening to God! This is beautiful! A great believer of the last century, of the Orthodox tradition, Olivier Clément, said: "A civilization which has no place for prayer is a civilization in which old age has lost all meaning. And this is terrifying. For, above all, we need old people who pray; prayer is the



purpose of old age.” We need old people who pray because this is the very purpose of old age. The prayer of the elderly is a beautiful thing.

We are able to thank the Lord for the benefits received, and fill the emptiness of ingratitude that surrounds us. We are able to intercede for the expectations of younger generations and give dignity to the memory and sacrifices of past generations. We are able to remind ambitious young people that a life without love is a barren life. We are able say to young people who are afraid that anxiety about the future can be overcome. We are able to teach the young who are overly self-absorbed that there is more joy in giving than in receiving. Grandfathers and grandmothers form the enduring “chorus” of a great spiritual sanctuary, where prayers of supplication and songs of praise sustain the community which toils and struggles in the field of life.

Last, prayer unceasingly purifies the heart. Praise and supplication to God prevent the heart from becoming hardened by resentment and selfishness. How awful is the cynicism of an elderly person who has lost the meaning of his testimony, who scorns the young and does not communicate the wisdom of life! How beautiful, however, is the encouragement an elderly person manages to pass on to a young person who is seeking the meaning of faith and of life! It is truly the mission of grandparents, the vocation of the elderly. The words of grandparents have special value for the young. And the young know it. I still carry with me, always, in my breviary, the words my grandmother consigned to me in writing on the day of my priestly ordination. I read them often and they do me good.

How I would like a Church that challenges the throw-away culture with the overflowing joy of a new embrace between young and old! This is what I ask of the Lord today, this embrace! 

# Lord,

you know better than I know myself  
that I am growing older and one day will be old.  
Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must  
say something on every subject  
and on every occasion.

Release me from craving to  
straighten out everybody's affairs.  
Make me thoughtful but not moody;  
helpful but not bossy.

With my vast store of wisdom  
it seems a pity not to use it all;  
but you know, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.  
Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details,  
give me wings to get to the point.  
Seal my lips on my aches and pains,  
they are increasing and love of rehearsing them  
is becoming sweeter as the years go by.

I dare not ask for grace enough  
to enjoy the tales of others' pains,  
but help me to endure them with patience.



St. Paul, MN



Taipei, Taiwan



Oreg

I dare not ask for improved memory,  
but for growing humility and a lessening cocksureness  
when my memory seems to clash  
with the memories of others.  
Teach me the glorious lesson  
that occasionally I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet;  
I do not want to be a saint,  
some of them are so hard to live with,  
but a sour old person is one of the  
crowning works of the devil.

Give me the ability to see good things  
in unexpected places  
and talent in unexpected people,  
and give me O Lord the grace to tell them so.  
AMEN.

*Attributed to a 17th century nun*

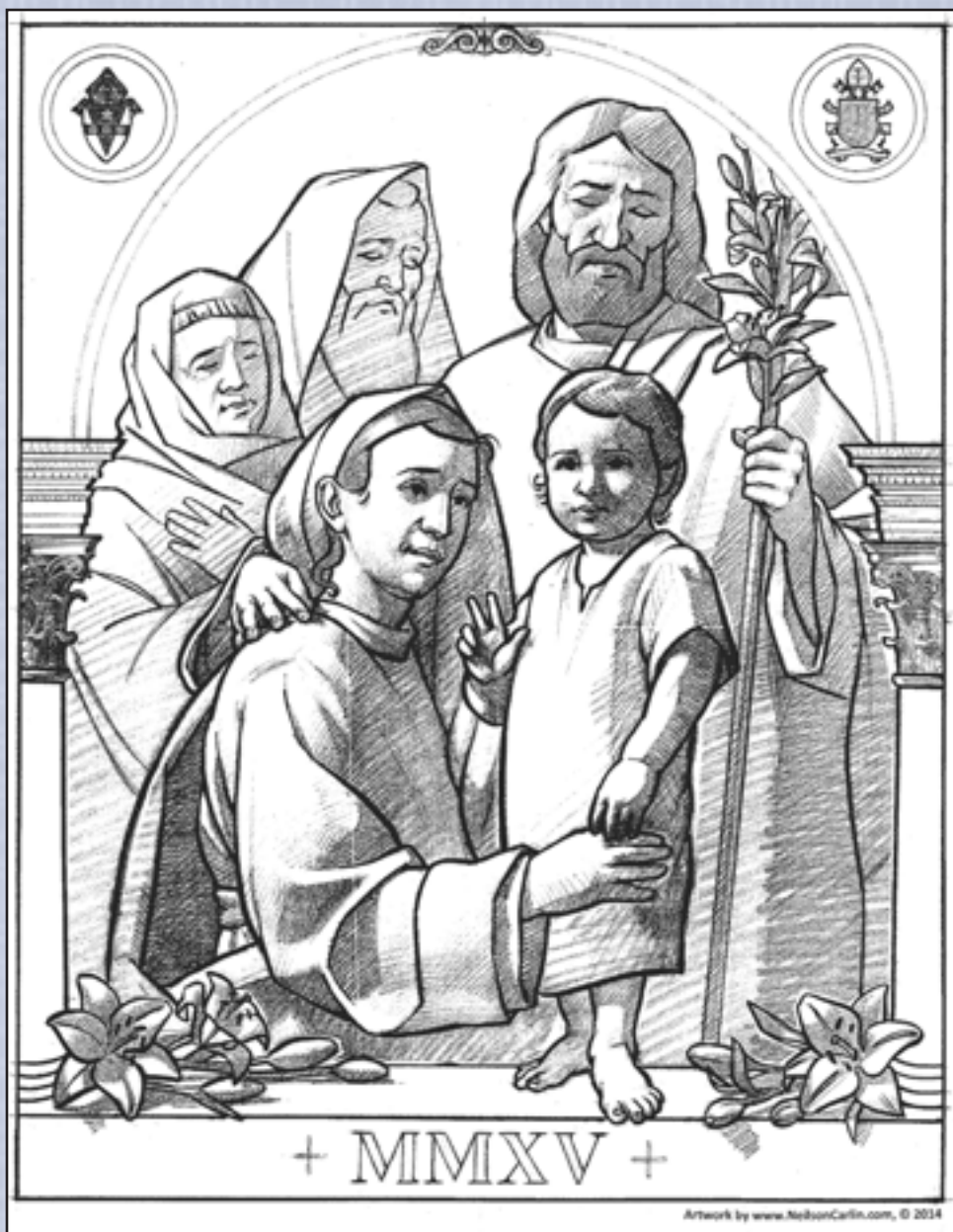


on, OH



Penang, Malaysia





A coloring activity to share with grandchildren!

Download a larger version at our website, [www.littlesistersofthepoor.org](http://www.littlesistersofthepoor.org)





# Grandparenting

## a great and happy vocation

Our contemporary culture has a rather impoverished concept of family life. A quick search of “family” in *Google Images* yields almost nothing but softly lit photos of attractive two-parent, two-children households. Today in the West the concept of “family” is narrowly understood as the “nuclear” family. How refreshing it was, then, when we got our first look at the official icon for the upcoming World Meeting of Families. The artist, Neilson Carlin, presents the Holy Family as multi-generational! Discretely standing behind Jesus, Mary and Joseph are Joachim and Anne, the parents of Mary and grandparents of Our Lord. Although we don’t know if Jesus actually lived with his grandparents, Carlin’s image of a multigenerational Holy Family leads us to reflect on the relationships between generations.

Multigenerational families are more common than we might think. According to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), 5.8 million children in the United States live in households headed by grandparents. For 20% of these kids both parents are absent. As a result, about 2.5 million seniors in the United States are responsible for raising their grandchildren. Such families are often referred to as “grandfamilies.”

Although many older persons have daily contact with, if not complete responsibility for, their grandchildren, millions of others live far away from loved ones. According to a recent AARP study, 66% of American grandparents live more than twenty-five miles away from their grandchildren, and 75% wish they could see their grandchildren more often. At the same time, research has shown that children’s optimal emotional and social maturation

tion requires positive relationships with four to six involved, mature adults. Who better to fill this role than grandparents?

Relationships between children and their grandparents differ according to circumstances, cultural norms and family expectations, but the traditional role of grandparents — giving unconditional love and passing on family, cultural and religious values — is more necessary than ever in our highly connected yet overly distracted world.

Speaking of being connected, an array of online resources exists to help grandparents make the most of their privileged role in the family, whether they share the same roof with their grandchildren or visit them through social media. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the American Grandparents Association (AGA) and the England-based Catholic Grandparents Association are just a few of the organizations offering advice and practical resources to seniors. We draw from these and other resources in the following reflections.

## Tips for intergenerational families

- 1. Make sure your home can safely accommodate everyone,** especially the very young and the very old or physically disabled. Pay special attention to bathrooms, kitchens and stairs.
- 2. Set boundaries and keep channels of communication open.** Discuss issues before they become problems; be aware of each family member's desires, concerns and fears. Decide up front who does which chores, who pays for what and who should discipline the kids.
- 3. Give each person some privacy and space of their own,** even if it's only a corner, a favorite chair or a desk for doing homework.
- 4. Respect elders' lifelong habits and interests.** Older people, even those who are being cared for, need to be able to maintain a sense of independence and personal identity.



Children's optimal emotional and social maturation requires positive relationships with four to six involved, mature adults.

**5. Establish routines.** Maintain reasonable routines for mealtimes, domestic tasks, bedtime rituals, etc.

**6. Foster loving relationships.** Take time to enjoy one another and develop shared interests that will nurture bonds and create cherished memories.

**7. Don't get caught in the middle.** This is especially relevant for parents, who can find themselves in a no-man's-land trying to please and care for both the older and young generations.

**8. Be realistic.** There is only so much room in a house, and only 24 hours in a day. Teenagers will want to spend only so much time with their elders, and grandparents will only tolerate so much loud music. Try to understand and accept each generation as they are.

**9. Make memories.** Share and cherish family stories, traditions, recipes, photos and memorabilia. Treasure the good times spent together, even if difficult circumstances created the multigenerational household.



## The invaluable role(s) of grandparents

Older people contribute something to a family that younger generations simply cannot bring. They have multifaceted, irreplaceable roles in the heart of the family:

- 1. Role model and hero:** In a world where celebrities so often disappoint them, young people need heroes who are worthy of the title. Grandparents are well-prepared to meet this need thanks to their work experience, accomplishments and accumulated knowledge and wisdom. They can also give younger generations a powerful example of perseverance through struggles, loyalty in relationships and faith sustained over a lifetime. Finally, as they approach the end of their lives the elderly can give an eloquent example of courage in suffering.
- 2. Historian:** Grandparents are repositories of family genealogy, history, traditions and stories, which they can pass down to younger generations in unique and endearing ways.
- 3. Friend and cheerleader:** Grandparents and older aunts and uncles often possess generous and selfless hearts. They

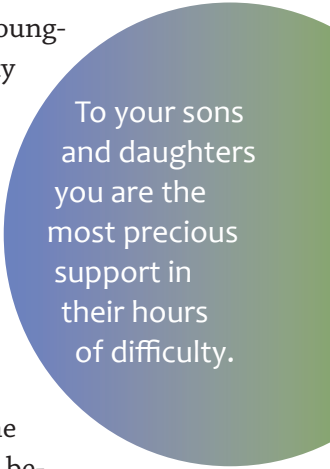


are more concerned for the wellbeing of others than themselves and they know how to build up a young person's self-confidence. Freer than working parents, they can more easily give the gift of time, undivided attention and a listening ear to their grandchildren. Saint John Paul II once confided to a group of seniors, "The elderly often have the charism to bridge generation gaps before they are made: how many children have found understanding and love in the eyes and words and caresses of the aging!"

**4. Teacher:** Older people have accumulated a lifetime of skills and knowledge to be shared with younger generations. Giving them the opportunity to impart this knowledge and appreciating their contributions is a wonderful gift the young can give back in return.

The Catholic Grandparents Association devotes much of its energies to coaching grandparents to be teachers of the faith through word and example. They encourage Catholic grandparents to maintain faith traditions such as praying the rosary, morning and night prayer and grace before meals, making the Sign of the Cross, and keeping various Christian symbols and devotional objects around the house. They also emphasize the value of preserving and being able to explain the Christian significance of holidays whose original meaning has been clouded by secular overtones — Christmas, Easter and even All Hallows' Eve! The example of such practices can open dialogue about the faith with grandchildren whose faith formation may be weak.

**5. Childcare:** With both parents working in many families, grandparents are often relied upon to babysit grandchildren and provide transportation and accompaniment to outside activities.



To your sons  
and daughters  
you are the  
most precious  
support in  
their hours  
of difficulty.

Early in his pontificate Saint John Paul II encouraged senior citizens in their important role in the family: “How often you have to relieve the young parents, how well you know how to introduce the youngsters to the history of your family and of your home country, to the tales of your people and to the world of faith! The young adults with their problems often find an easier way to you than to their parents’ generation. To your sons and daughters you are the most precious support in their hours of difficulty...”

The Catholic Grandparents Association gives valuable advice about *how* elders should fulfill their vocation. The presence and example of grandparents should be “unobtrusive, never overbearing, always respectful of the rights and values of others. It involves always being at hand when needed, but never imposing oneself, never interfering. Knowing when to offer a helping hand or a word of advice, but also knowing when to stand back.” This is indeed a demanding program, the Association recognizes, “but it is important to stress that we are talking about doing something vital for God. We have every right to challenge him to help and guide us, and to count on his support.”

## Teachers of life lessons

We have already discussed the role of grandparents as teachers. The American Association of Grandparents proposes specific virtues and life lessons grandparents can teach the young. These virtues include caring and empathy, confidence, respect for self and others, thankfulness and generosity. Learning these other-centered virtues is particularly important today, the Association emphasizes, because our contemporary culture fosters narcissism and self-entitlement rather than generosity and selfless love.

Life lessons to be imparted to the young include the Golden Rule, the realization that life isn’t always easy and the conviction that “lying won’t get you anywhere.”



## Tuned into teens

Writing for the American Grandparents Association, Ellen Pober Rittberg suggests that “there are things your teen grand-kids won’t tell you, but that you need to know.” The following are eight rules of thumb grandparents should keep in mind in order to stay close to teens.

**1. “Be interested in what interests me.”** Rittberg suggests that when teens complain that their parents don’t understand them, they are often correct. Because grandparents have already raised teens to adulthood, she says, they are able to understand what their grandchildren are experiencing from a different perspective and to steer them in positive directions.

**2. “Use your disappointment on me.”** If teens have a good relationship with their parents, then when they mess up they are usually upset about their mistakes — after the fact. On the other hand, Rittberg asserts, if they have good relationships with their grandparents, then when they are merely contemplating doing something bad, their fear of having to face Grandma or Grandpa may deter them.

**3. “We are sneaky. Yes, all of us.”** Grandparents know the truth of this claim firsthand based on their own children’s experiences growing up. Parents of teens, Rittberg says, are often too trusting, believing that their own kids would never lie to them. Grandparents know better.

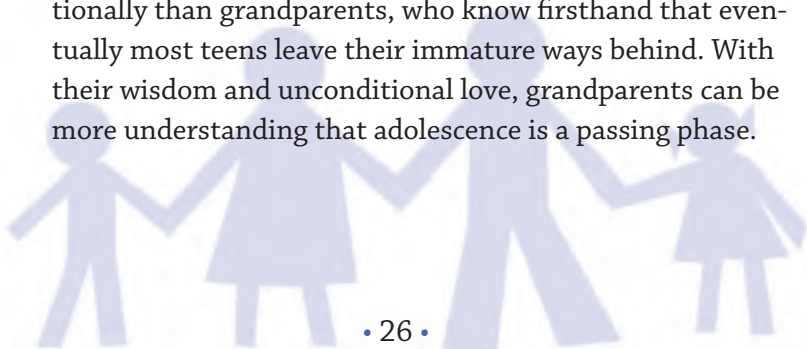
**4. “Give me rules and enforce them.”** Grandparents shouldn’t be afraid to enforce the rules their children have put in place, or to establish their own rules and expectations when they are responsible for their grandkids. By setting and enforcing rules, adults give teens predictability and structure, as well as a way to combat peer pressure.

**5. “Encourage me to pursue my interests.”** An idle teen is not a good thing, especially in this era of social communication and video games. Helping teens engage in sports or develop other interests will help them cultivate their God-given talents, but could also foster common bonds between generations.

**6. “Don’t spoil me.”** Grandparents might be tempted to spoil their grandchildren with gifts, but limiting spending and helping them become thoughtful consumers would be a better use of seniors’ disposable income.

**7. “Notice if I’m in trouble.”** In our frenetic society parents are so busy that they sometimes miss signs of trouble. A grandparent’s radar may be more sensitive.

**8. “At some point I will mess up.”** Rittberg asserts that parents often react to their kids’ mistakes far more emotionally than grandparents, who know firsthand that eventually most teens leave their immature ways behind. With their wisdom and unconditional love, grandparents can be more understanding that adolescence is a passing phase.





## Grandparenting is a calling from God

Clearly grandparenting is about more than just spoiling the little ones! The Catholic Grandparents Association gives seniors precious encouragement in their vocation: “Our title ‘grandparent’ is surely one of honor. ‘Grand’ is a word that signifies importance ... The word ‘grand’ in French means ‘great’. What could be greater or more important than our vital task of handing on to future generations the values, skills, accomplishments of the past, enhanced by the additions and improvements of our own time? This is the way in which communities and nations grow and develop — in fact, the way in which civilization itself advances. But when, as believing Christian grandparents, we talk of our special role in ... the handing on of the faith, ... it becomes a calling, a calling from God or, in the Church’s language, a vocation. It’s the vocation that gives meaning to our later years, when our strength starts to wane and our powers to decline. And, not only meaning but also joy, since it brings us closer to people — children — whom we already love. So, as well as being great and important, this is a happy vocation, something to be welcomed and celebrated, something which lights up both our own later life and the early lives of our grandchildren.” 🌿



A few days after the death of Chicago's Cardinal Francis George, a Resident of our home in Washington expressed the wish that he might obtain one of the Cardinal's memorial cards. Carl is a lifelong resident of Washington and had never met the Mid-western prelate. But as he explained: "I always admired Cardinal George because he was disabled like me, but he didn't let it stop him." The Cardinal had been struck with polio as a 13 year-old boy; Carl has been physically disabled since birth. "He was like me"... The Cardinal would have been pleased to know that his weakness had served as an inspiration for someone else.

Francis Eugene George was an eminent scholar, a zealous missionary priest and a devoted pastor to his Chicagoland flock. Certainly he should be remembered for more than his physical disability, and yet in the context of our apostolate his lifelong

embrace of illness and suffering merits reflection. In a column written shortly after the Cardinal's death, George Weigel spoke on this very subject:

"His sister once told a Chicago priest that, if he wanted to understand her brother, he should remember that 'he's always in pain.' A polio survivor from the days of the iron lung, Francis George spent his entire adult life with his legs encased in dozens of pounds of steel. Then he was struck by bladder cancer and lived for years with what he called, ruefully, a 'neo-bladder.' He beat that challenge, but then another form of cancer struck, and his last years were filled with new pain, more pain, different pain. Yet not once, since I first met him three decades ago ... did I ever hear him complain about the pain — or about the sometimes strange ways God has with those he has blessed in so many other facets of their lives. Francis George could live in chronic pain because he conformed his life to Christ and the Cross."

Cardinal George reflected on suffering and death in his weekly column shortly after being diagnosed with cancer for the

*Remembering*  
CARDINAL FRANCIS



## NCIS GEORGE

Celebration of Jeanne Jugan's canonization, St. Vincent de Paul Church, 11/1/09

second time in August of 2012, beginning with an excerpt of Pope Benedict's homily for the feast of the Assumption that year. "Pope Benedict XVI preached this beautiful passage: 'Today there are many things said about a better world in the future: it would be our hope. Whether and when this better world will come, we do not know, I do not know.... One thing, one hope is certain: God awaits us, he attends to us, we are not headed for a void, we are expected. God awaits us and, passing to the other

world, we will find the Mother's goodness, we will find our loved ones, we will find Eternal Love."

The Cardinal explained that he had just undergone tests to determine if his cancer had recurred. It had. "If we have to die, why should we live, especially with disease and pain?" he asked. "Each person lives in several systems that answer that question, for better or worse. For many, the desire to love and raise their children and grandchildren gives the basic meaning of their lives. For others, it might be a great project or a historical achievement, which lifts an individual life into a web of consequences that last long beyond physical death."

The Cardinal identified the core issue behind so much current debate related to the beginning and end of life. "These days,"

he wrote, “control of one’s personal life is so primary that many see no point in living beyond the moment when they lose a sense of personal autonomy. That’s why assisted suicide has become an arguable ‘right’ in some people’s system of life.... But we are never in control. That is a Promethean dream that ends in meaningless tragedy.”

Reflecting on his own life Cardinal George confided that as a young man he prayed that he “might live in such a way that God’s will for the world’s salvation might be realized.” As his life was coming to an end he prayed that sharing his experience might lead people to reflect on God’s goodness, drawing them closer to Christ. “Then even my sickness and, at some point at a still unknown time and way, my death,” he continued, “will be an answer to what I prayed many years ago: that I and all those God has given me to know and love here might live in such a way that God’s will for the salvation of the world will be realized.”

Cardinal George’s final illness and death did, in fact, make a lasting impression on many. In his funeral homily, the Cardinal’s close friend, Archbishop Peter Sartain of Seattle, reminisced about something his friend once said in informal remarks to a group of young adults: “The only thing we take with us when we die is what we have given away.”

“I pondered those words for a long time, and over the past few weeks, as he neared death,” the Archbishop said. “He was fond of reminding us that our relationships with the Lord and with each other are all that endure — all else goes to the grave.” Archbishop Sartain cited the foreword of the Cardinal’s soon-to-be published book, in which he quoted Pope Francis. “The final horizon is God’s infinite love,” Cardinal George wrote. “Just as we pray to see God face to face, so God wants to see us face to face. We give him our time, which is all that we have, and he takes the gift and calls us when he is ready to do so.”

“The only thing we take with us when we die is what we have given away ... the only things that endure are our relationships with God and with others ... we give him all that we have,



The only thing we take with us when we die is what we have given away. The only things that endure are our relationships with God and with others. We give him all that we have, and he takes the gift and calls us when he is ready to do so.

and he takes the gift and calls us when he is ready to do so,” Archbishop Sartain mused. “Spontaneously, from the fullness of his heart, Cardinal George gave to the Lord and to us, and both his written words and his unedited afterthoughts brought to light a profound interior life motivated by hope, hope in the Lord.”

Cardinal George's example and words are a priceless legacy, teaching us what it means to offer our lives as a gift and inspiring courage in our own sufferings. The Cardinal was loved by so many that memorial cards were in short supply after his funeral, but our Little Sisters in Chicago did manage to procure one for Carl, our Resident in Washington. Like the Cardinal, he offers his daily aches and pains to the Lord without complaint, hoping to contribute to God's will for the world's salvation. Carl knows that a kindred spirit will be waiting for him when his own earthly journey is complete. 🌿

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# *Prayer for Grandparents*

Pope Benedict XVI

Lord Jesus,  
you were born of the Virgin Mary,  
the daughter of Saints Joachim and Anne.  
Look with love on grandparents the world over.  
Protect them!  
They are a source of enrichment for families,  
for the Church and for all of society.  
Support them!  
As they grow older,  
may they continue to be for their families  
strong pillars of Gospel faith,  
guardians of noble domestic ideals,  
living treasures of sound religious traditions.  
Make them teachers of wisdom and courage,  
that they may pass on to future generations  
the fruits of their mature human and spiritual experience.  
Lord Jesus, help families and society  
to value the presence and roles of grandparents.  
May they never be ignored or excluded,  
but always encounter respect and love.  
Help them to live serenely and to feel welcomed  
in all the years of life which you give them.  
Mary, Mother of all the living,  
keep grandparents constantly in your care,  
accompany them on their earthly pilgrimage,  
and by your prayers, grant that all families  
may one day be reunited in our heavenly homeland,  
where you await all humanity for the great  
embrace of life without end. Amen!

# *Serenity*

JULY 2015, No. 167

PUBLICATIONS OFFICE  
LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR  
601 MAIDEN CHOICE LANE  
BALTIMORE, MD 21228-3698  
[www.littlesistersofthepoor.org](http://www.littlesistersofthepoor.org)

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