



GRANDPARENTS

a great gift to family life

Much about family life that was previously taken for granted is now subject to some turmoil. We are confronted with the challenge of looking for appropriate ways to respond. One way is by drawing upon the great gift to family life that comes through the presence of grandparents.

Grandparents are a wonderful gift to the human family. In particular, that rich relationship which can exist between grandparent and grandchild is a great treasure of family life. In an address in 2008, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of three 'grandparent' moments that are worthy of reflection. First he commented how in the past, grandparents, 'even with their advancing age they continued to be present with their children, their grandchildren and even their great-grandchildren, giving a living witness of caring, sacrifice and a daily gift of themselves without reserve.' Today, social change has dramatically influenced family life

and the Pope remarked how many grandparents find themselves "in a sort of 'parking area': some realise they are a burden to their family and prefer to live alone or in retirement homes with all the consequences that such decisions entail". Finally, Pope Benedict commented on the importance of grandparents as a living presence in the family, in the Church and in the society and of how 'in the face of the crisis of the family' we might set out anew by drawing on the witness of grandparents whose values and projects have revealed an essential resilience.

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A growing body of sociological evidence supports the importance of the contribution of grandparents to 21st century family life.

Grandparents are a vital link between the generations and grandchildren often regard grandad and grandma as *confidantes* and sources of advice in important matters. This very intimate and personal relationship often evolves alongside that of the parent-child relationship and becomes particularly important when time-limited parents become challenged to find a way forward on a difficult issue. It is often Nan or Pop to whom a child might turn when they seek an uncritical advocate who will provide loving advice and support. In those very difficult situations following family breakdown, one university study commented that "grandparents often provide the one stable factor in family life and those to whom the children turn for personal counseling and support in times of stress." (University of Hertfordshire).

Intergenerational connectivity is an important social mainstay. A link with those who have preceded us

I always like seeing my grandparents. It is really nice when they are with me and care for me. They always make me feel happy. Thomas, 7 year old Grandson

and who have an unconditional love for us and a genuine interest in our welfare is of enormous personal benefit. This is particularly so when we are young and we are experiencing the challenges that come with coping with the fears of childhood and the storms of adolescence. The calm, loving contribution of a grandparent can be very valuable during these times. Grandparents who have been true to their own marriage vows also witness to an ecclesial reality; they are a living response to St John Chrysostom's call to "make your home a church". They reveal to young people that children are the living embodiment of the fruitful and faithful covenants of their parents and grandparents. As children grow into adulthood they appreciate how the ongoing love of their married grandparents for one another reveals the reality of a love that is both fruitful and self-sacrificial. Along with the witness of their own mother and father, this experience helps grandchildren to learn what is constituted by enduring and committed marital love. At a time in their lives when they may have more opportunity to reflect wisely on the Christian call to live a 'good life', grandparents can be living witnesses of how

My grandparents are always so caring and willing to help me. I really like hearing about their family life when they were growing up and about the people in my own family who lived before me. My grandad always carried his rosary beads with him and my grandma told me that to love God was the best thing you could do in you life. Dominic, 10 year old Grandson

we are called to be in our relationships with one another. Catholic grandparents have always been important as an avenue for passing on the faith to their grandchildren and for helping them to lead good Christian lives. Their valuable contribution may never have been in so urgent a demand as it is now. We only have to look at almost any Church congregation today to view the regular efforts of grandparents in taking their grandchildren to Sunday Mass. This is one of a number of other ways in which grandparents can aid in the development of their grandchildren in the faith.

Children love to hear stories and when grandparents tell faith-promoting stories to their grandchildren this can have profound effects. Such stories need not be limited to the lives of the saints but might also include stories from their own extended family and about their ancestors who have experienced the love of God in a particularly significant way. Supporting children during their religious milestones can also be very formative. Making efforts to attend Baptisms, First Communions, and Confirmations and giving commemorative religious items on such occasions assists children in their development of an awareness of the great gift of one's Catholic faith. Grandparents should also pray aloud with their grandchildren. In

Grandparents always want to share things with you that will help you in life. They think of their faith as a great treasure. They have seen so much in their lives, both good and bad, and their faith is the thing that they value the most... It is also good for me to see the bond between my parents and their parents. It reminds me of how love goes on down through the generations.
Jessica, 22 year old Granddaughter

this way children and young people will see how those esteemed adults whom they regard as loving and wise counselors are themselves vitally aware of the importance of prayer and of putting God first in all that a person does in life. Perhaps, more than anything else this is the greatest gift any grandfather or grandmother could give their grandchild.

I have always loved being with my grandchildren. I am much blessed to have them and I find children at all ages so interesting. When you begin to get on a bit in years children still think you are marvelous. They always make you feel that you are special to them. Joan, 91 year old Grandmother

Grandparents caring for grandchildren:

Almost one in five children aged 0-11 years are looked after to some extent by grandparents who contribute 31% of the total hours of care provided.

Three quarters of 0-11 year old children receive some amount of informal care and grandparents are the largest providers of this type of care.

An estimated 22,500 Australian families have a grandparent or grandparents as guardians of grandchildren; they care for 31,100 children, 92% of whom have a natural parent living elsewhere; 26% of these children have little or no face to face contact with a parent.

ABS, 4102.0
Australian Social Trends, 2005





Pope Benedict XVI's Prayer for Grandparents

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,
guardian of noble domestic ideals,
living treasuries 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!

We should not forget that Jesus Christ also had grandparents. It was in the loving home of Joachim and Anne that Jesus' own mother Mary, came to know how to live a life steeped in love and virtue. The information we have about the parents of Mary, the Mother of God, comes from an apocryphal Christian text written about the year 170 AD. In answer to the prayers of Joachim and Anne who had previously been childless, Mary was born and subsequently dedicated to God by her parents at a very early age. These grandparents of Jesus became models of Christian marriage and their meeting at the Golden Gate in Jerusalem has been a favourite subject of early Christian artists. The feast of Saints Joachim and Anne is celebrated on 26 July. Joachim and Anne were also a source of inspiration for the Prayer for Grandparents which was composed by Pope Benedict XVI. It is a prayer that all of us would do well to include as a part of our regular personal and family prayer. By praying for our grandparents, our own families will continue to benefit from their powerful witness as "pillars of faith, guardians of noble domestic ideals, living treasuries of sound religious traditions... (and) teachers of wisdom and courage".

Why God Gave Us Grandparents

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God knew that when we were older
we would need someone to see only the best in us...
someone who would always trust and believe in
us especially when we weren't feeling so
good about ourselves.

He saw that we would need someone
to make us feel important by asking our
opinions and listening to our ideas...
someone who would know when we could use
a sympathetic ear and a word of encouragement
or when we should be left alone to sort
things out for ourselves.

And so God gave us grandparents...
for their warmhearted laughter and
gentle kindness,
their tears of concern and words of praise,
for their smiles and their prayers
and most of all — their love.

That's why God gave us grandparents. (Anon).