



From Deacon Mark Miller's Desk

The World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly is coming up on 25 Jul. Catholics worldwide are being asked to “be present in the lives of older people.” Meeting that challenge takes some planning and preparation. Pope Francis’ has emphasized “the spiritual and human wealth that has been handed down from generation to generation.” He asks that we move away from a simple Sunday afternoon dinner. In announcing the celebration, Pope Francis reminded the faithful that “the Holy Spirit even today stirs up thoughts and words of wisdom in the elderly.” This day is intended as an opportunity to exchange stories, build memories, and commemorate legacies. To achieve those ends, there is a lot of planning to do.

First: send out a “save the date”. Grandparents – from both sides of the family are obvious, but don’t forget other elderly family members. If that’s too large a group, consider celebrating twice. Send notices to your kids too; their schedules can fill up quickly.

Second, include the church. Attending Reconciliation as a family is a good way to start your commemoration. Gathering as a family for Mass on the 25th will be an important part of “being present” with your family members.

Third, plan a specific activity or two with an emphasis on sharing and learning the knowledge that comes from the experiences of our seniors. You could:

- Develop your family's immigration history. Many of us are just two or three generations away from arriving in this country. Does the youngest in the family know the story of the oldest?
- Make a family tree. Get everyone's name, write their story in a paragraph, find a picture of each person.
- Discover what technology was like for your grandparents/elders. Did you know they had to pay for internet service AND access? Learn about AOL and COMUSERVE. What was email service like for them? What was it like when you had to pay 10 cents to read a text? How did they look up info before Google?
- Collect favorite recipes; cook grandpa's favorite dinner from the recipes HIS mother used.
- Make a map of all the places your family members have lived.

- How has your family served? Have members served in the military? Peace Corps? Teach for America? Missionaries?
- If you're part of a family business, do you know its story?
- If your family has its roots in Noblesville, plan a walking/driving tour of the city to visit places that hold family history.
- Set-up an online meeting with Skype, Zoom, or Microsoft Teams to include family that aren't local or can't travel.
- Visit family in care facilities. Bring those family members to your home.
- As a family, visit a care facility to share the day with someone who has no one to share it with.
- Produce a family history video. Interview grandparents and elderly family.
- Grandchildren can learn what games their grandparents played. What where their favorite school activities? Find out their favorite bands and make a mixed playlist. Find videos of those bands on YouTube.
- Include a visit to the cemetery where family members are interred. Pay for their souls. Tell their stories.
- What major world events have they lived through? Korean Conflict? Viet Nam? Energy Crisis of '73? Deseret Storm? Where were they on 9/11?

The celebration of Grandparents and the Elderly Day will always be connected to the feast day for Saints Joachim and Anne – Jesus' grandparents; their feast day occurs on 26 Jul. It will be commemorated each year on the fourth Sunday in July closest to the 25th.

For this first year's celebration, Pope Francis has chosen the theme "I am with you always." He explained "'I am with you always' is also a promise of closeness and hope that young and old can mutually share. Not only are grandchildren and young people called upon to be present in the lives of older people, but older people and grandparents also have a mission of evangelization, proclamation, and prayer, and of encouraging young people in their faith."

But for now, clear your calendars, send out the "save-the-date" notices, and give some thought to how you can implement the theme and create an enjoyable and meaningful celebration.