

# Grandparents and their role of passing on the faith

## Interview with a grandmother-author on the challenges and rewards of sharing faith with the grandkids

### Grandparents can play a role as intermediaries in the transmission of the faith to their grandchildren.

By France Lebreton

"God has a large population of grandparents throughout the world... They are the indispensable link in educating children and young people in the faith."

Pope Francis -- who, at age 84, is old enough to be a great-grandfather -- made that observation last year during an international conference at the Vatican on the pastoral care of the elderly.

The pope has spoken often about the role his own grandmother Rosa played in his life of faith and has urged grandchildren and grandparents to strengthen their own relationship.

"I feel that this is what the Lord wants me to say: that there is an alliance between the young and the old," he wrote a 2018 book called *Sharing the Wisdom of Time*.

His main point was that "we need the elderly to be dreamers" so they can "inspire" youngsters to have hope for the future.

That's a message that resonates with Florence Bosviel, a French journalist and author who has written about this very topic.

La Croix's France Lebreton spoke with her about the challenges and rewards of sharing the faith with the grandkids.

La Croix: Are grandparents well placed to transmit the faith to their grandchildren?

Florence Bosviel: Grandparents have a special and privileged place.

They are not in the front line of the educational mission.

They see their grandchildren on Wednesdays and during vacations, which are perfect times for listening in a non-threatening way.

There is less tension and there can be a lot of trust. Another advantage is that seniors generally have more perspective on their lives and more time to reflect on their faith journey.

How can grandparents pass on the faith?

Faith is not passed on as a skill. Rather, it is done as a way of being, and it goes far beyond that.

Faith gives meaning to our life: it is a path that connects with the path of our existence. God acts in us.

We must dare to bear witness to what faith transforms in us, even if there are periods of doubt or moments of bewilderment.

So that the word of the Gospel may begin to speak to the young person to whom we are speaking, whatever his age, grandparents can play the role of intermediaries.

But the relationship with God is direct. Everyone can dialogue with God and hear themselves say, "It is good that you exist and I love you".

How can this be done?

Let us dare to speak, pass on our experience. But it is how young people accept it that they can have their own experience. They have a leap to make.

We are the plank that allows them to go from one bank to the other. We can give them the desire to do so. We can witness their faith in enthusiasm.

It is not a straitjacket of constraints, but on the contrary a source of joy and fulfillment.

Starting from their life experiences and then sharing that, "I too, in such and such a circumstance, I was really down, and such and such a phrase from the Gospel came back to me and enlightened me."

A number of grandparents feel guilty about not being able to do this...Everyone has their own way of doing things depending on who they are and what they like.

Some feel overwhelmed, others are worried.

They should not hesitate to join a discussion group for support and ideas. You have to get rid of guilt.

On the other hand, a certain uneasiness is the antidote to resignation.

One must strive to remain humble, authentic and trustworthy.

The more we engage in dialogue, the more grandchildren push us to our limits.

We speak to each other in truth, we make ourselves vulnerable, reciprocity is established, we are on the same footing. Sometimes, faith is passed on in both directions!

Do grandparents need parental consent to share their faith with the grandkids?

Things need to be clear. If parents are against religion, it is awkward to oppose this refusal.

Quite often parents don't feel motivated to talk to their children about it, but accept that it goes through their own parents. A minimum of consensus is necessary.

Praying with them and taking them to Mass with you can make sense, even if there is no parental involvement, especially if we take the time afterwards to return to certain words: it is a good opportunity to hear their questions and to return to the message of the Gospel!