

GRANDPARENTS REALLY ARE SPECIAL

Some people become grandparents with enthusiasm, picturing all the fun they're going to have with their grandchildren. Some arrive with hesitation, concerned about the circumstances into which their grandchild is born. Some would have liked to have waited a few years before becoming grandparents, thinking themselves too young to take on this role. Yet when a new grandchild arrives and is placed in our arms, there is an instant connection between grandparent and grandchild. Experts have even referred to this as a primal bond, coming from deep inside of both grandparent and grandchild. It's a powerful bond that draws us one another.

Studies have shown that grandparents and grandchildren are naturally attracted to one another. Grandchildren who have regular contact with their grandparents have better self-esteem, a better sense of who they are and what they stand for. They're better able to resist peer pressure and more likely to keep the family's values than those who grow up without the benefit of grandparents.

Not all grandparents have ready access to their grandchildren due to geographical distance or family trauma. But grandparents who take the time to reach out to their grandchildren in whatever way they can, including the use of social media, can make a powerful difference in the lives of their grandchildren.

Pope Francis makes reference to grandparents, urging them to be involved in the lives of their grandchildren. In the "Joy of Love", he tells us of the significance of this role: "Very often it is grandparents who ensure that the most important values are passed down to their grandchildren, and many people can testify that they owe their initiation into the Christian life to their grandparents. Their words, their affection, or simply their presence help children to realize that history did not begin with them, that they are now part of an age-old pilgrimage and that they need to respect all that came before them."

Whether we're ready or not, whether we feel equipped for the job or not, God has called grandparents to a great role in life. In fact, being a grandparent may be the greatest role we ever play. It offers us a chance to bring together all the wisdom we have acquired through our experience of life, all the history we carry from having lived a long life, and all the talents we've developed, however large or small they may be. In our grandchildren, God has sent us a readymade audience and companions to walk with us on our own journey into old age. We can teach our grandchildren not only how to live well but also how to die well.

One of the greatest challenges facing many grandparents today is that their grandchildren are not being raised in the Catholic faith or any faith. There is much heartache among grandparents about this and often a sense of failure. It's helpful then to spend time with other grandparents to get ideas, encouragement and support. We may not be able to change the circumstances in which our grandchildren are being raised, but we can grow in our own faith and model for our grandchildren what a life of prayer and trust in God can mean.

In the Southern Region we have started a Catholic Grandparent group that meets for 6-8 weeks in the Fall and 6-8 weeks again in the spring. We bring together men and women who wish to take their faith seriously and pass on our faith to our grandchildren. If you'd like to join us, we'll meet this Spring on Tuesdays, 9:30 – 11 a.m. (after 9:00 a.m. mass) at Church of the Holy Family, Endwell, Room 6, beginning February 26th- March 20th. Everyone is welcome at anytime.

If you'd like to start a Catholic Grandparents group in your home or parish, contact Kathleen Colligan through the Family/Respect Life Office or e-mail me at kcolligan@syrdio.org . I'd be glad to help you.