



GRAND NEWS

A newsletter for all Grandparents in the Diocese of Arundel & Brighton

No. 2 - Winter 2024



“Our most important pastoral task with regard to families is to strengthen their love.”

(Amoris Laetitia 246)

A message from our Marriage & Family Adviser, Deacon Simon South

“Grandparents are the beacon of Christ’s love”

Welcome to our winter edition of Grand News.

With the coming of another Advent season, I find myself reflecting on the years gone by with a warm sense of nostalgia. I think back to Christmas times with my parents, grandparents and family members, and those family traditions that we followed every year without fail, as many families do - unique things that made Christmas so special.

This sense of looking back was evident, last month (November), with many of the Grandparents’ Network coming together at the diocesan central office, The St Philip Howard Centre in Crawley, to spend a glorious day with the author of “Grandparenting for Faith”, Becky Sedgewick. At the centre of Becky’s message on the day was a heartfelt affirmation of the importance

that grandparents had, and continue to have, in the faith journey of their families.

Becky asked us to think back to our own upbringing and our family traditions. Those that were at the heart of our family identity and that we have subsequently lived our lives both by and through. This was then followed by a very thought-provoking question – ‘where did those traditions originate from?’ Overwhelmingly our answers came back ‘my granny always did this, said this, or grandad used to take me and chat with me...’ Grandparents are a blessing from God and have such an important, often unnoticed, impact in shaping future generations.

Reflecting on the reality of modern-day life, Becky explored that many of our families are spread across counties and sometimes countries, and are often so immensely busy with the ‘stuff’ of life and that everything and everyone seems to be looking for their time and energy. Modern life is so hectic and chaotic. and yet Becky shared a message of hope that is founded well and truly within

Scripture – ‘do not be afraid’ - the message of hope that God gives us, more often than any other phrase in the Bible - did you know God tells us not to be afraid 365 times in total.

We have been given a special place in our family’s lives - opportunities come along to listen to our grandchildren, to be their confidante or sounding board, or to affirm to our adult children that we understand their challenges and that they are doing a good job. All while gently reminding them that Christ is part of the family and journeys with us all, in the middle of that glorious chaos and mess that we call life.

I hope you have a truly blessed Advent and Christmas season and enjoy creating those special traditions that make your family Christmas, yours.

Simon

To find out more about Marriage & Family life in our Diocese visit the diocesan website:

W: www.abdiocese.org.uk/formation/family-life



DATES FOR 2025

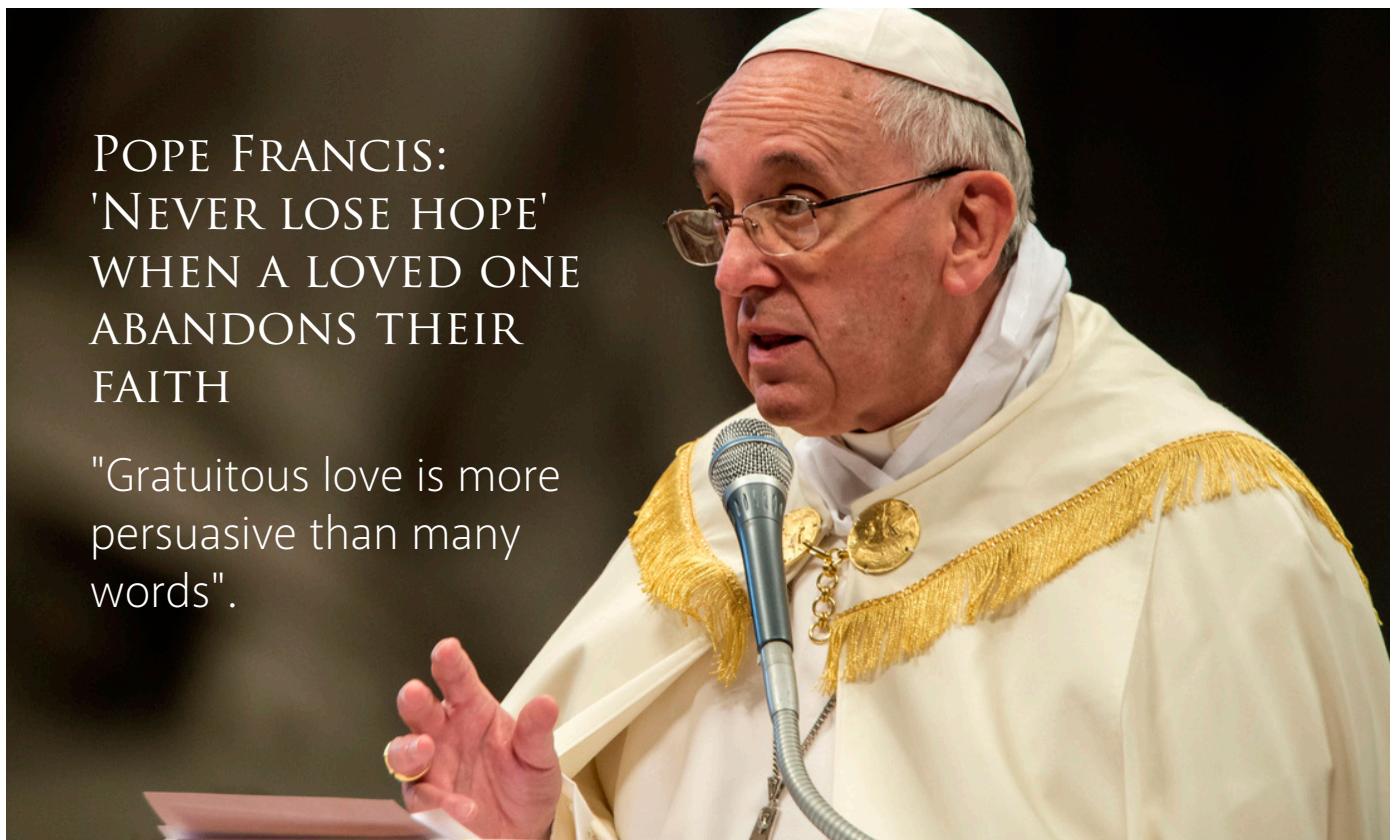
Thursday 6 February: Grandparents Network Leaders' Lunch with Bishop Richard

Wednesday 11 June: Grandparents' Pilgrimage (venue to be confirmed as extensive building work planned at West Grinstead)

Saturday 25 September: Grandparents' Formation Day at The St Philip Howard Centre, Crawley.

POPE FRANCIS: 'NEVER LOSE HOPE' WHEN A LOVED ONE ABANDONS THEIR FAITH

"Gratuitous love is more persuasive than many words".



Pope Francis has replied to a letter from an Italian grandmother concerned that her granddaughter, now five years old, has not been baptised by her non-religious parents. The brief letter, signed "Oliva from Bergamo", was published in the first edition of the new magazine *Piazza San Pietro* ('St Peter's Square'), published by St Peter's Basilica.

In the message, Oliva says that the decision taken by her daughter and son-in-law not to baptise her grandchild is "a source of great suffering" to her. "What will Jesus think of all this?", she asks.

In his reply, the Pope says that he understands Oliva's suffering and feels close to her. Baptism, he says, is "a great gift". Since his election as Pope, he notes, he has baptised many children, and always found this to be a moment of "great joy".

The Pope goes on to point out that one should "never lose hope" when a loved one loses their faith, recalling the example of St Monica, who prayed for decades for the conversion of her son St Augustine.

He also stressed that "baptism cannot be imposed on parents who do not want it for their children." Urging Oliva to "accompany your children, speak with them, but not insist on baptism".

"Gratuitous love is more persuasive than many words," the Pope writes. "Love for God plants seeds of the future, of friendship, of the search for Him."

Joseph Tulloch – Vatican News

Our mission is to pass on our faith to our grandchildren; in many family situations this is not easy, but we are aware that we "preach without words". Our grandchildren pick up on how we live our lives, seeing that our faith gives us hope, strength, and love of life. To strengthen this faith, we feed ourselves in our group times: listening to speakers, watching religious videos or sharing.

WHY ARE GRANDPARENTS AN IMPORTANT THEME FOR POPE FRANCIS?

For Pope Francis, the importance of grandparents is personal. Prior to becoming pope, and frequently since then, he has cited his own grandmother Rosa as critical to his priestly vocation.

"It was my grandmother who taught me to pray," he said. "She taught me a lot about faith and told me stories about the saints."

When he was a young seminarian, his "nonna" Rosa told him that "the most important thing for a priest is to celebrate Mass," and shared the story of another mother who advised her priest son "to celebrate Mass, every single Mass, as if it was your last."

The Pope's Bergoglio family emigrated from the northern Italian region of Piedmont to Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1929. Following the birth of the future Pope - Jorge Mario Bergoglio in 1936 - Jorge spent time each day in his grandparent's home.

Francis has written about how he keeps a note from his "nonna" in his breviary (a book containing the service for each day); "May my grandchildren, to whom I have given the best of my heart, have a long and happy life," she wrote. "But if there are days of pain or illness, or if the loss of a loved one fills them with despair, may they remember that a whisper of a prayer and a look to Mary at the feet of the cross, can be like a drop of balm on even the deepest and most painful wounds."



On 20 November, Pope Francis appealed to people of faith across the world "to pray and work for dialogue, reconciliation, peace [and] security" in a world divided "by hatred, hostility, wars and the threat of a nuclear conflict."

Speaking to members of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, and the Iranian Centre for Interreligious & Intercultural Dialogue, the Pope also highlighted the significant contribution made by the elderly in both the Christian and Islamic traditions in the education of the young, reaffirming his belief in the invaluable witness of grandparents. You can find out more here:

www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2024-11/pope-interreligius-dialogue-colloquium-dicastery-iran-peace.html



PRAYING FOR OUR FAMILY

Being a grandparent is one of life's greatest joys, but it also comes with a special kind of love and worry. You've seen enough of life to know that challenges are part of the journey. Sharing our experience can sometimes be helpful, but there is one thing which forms the cornerstone of our relationship with our family, turning to the Lord in prayer. Here are some prayers that you might find helpful in the midst of life's messiness:

Prayer for Emotional Well-being

Father, help my grandchild navigate their emotions and feelings. Grant them the strength to cope with sadness, anger, and confusion. May they always find peace, happiness, and love in their heart. Let your light shine through them, God.

Prayer for Confidence

Father, bless my grandchild with a healthy dose of self-confidence. Let them believe in their abilities and tackle challenges with a positive outlook. Help them stand tall in a world that often tries to bring them down.

Prayer for Humility

Heavenly Father, instil in my grandchild the virtue of humility. Let them achieve successes without arrogance and learn from failures without despair. May they recognize that all blessings come from you.

Prayer for Spiritual Growth

Dear God, nurture my grandchild's spiritual growth. May they seek to grow closer to you through prayer, scripture reading, and active participation in their faith community. Help them deepen their understanding of your love.

Prayer for Friendship

Father, bless my grandchild with the gift of true friendship. Help them choose friends who are supportive, kind, and uplifting. May they also be a great friend to others, showing love and compassion.

Prayer for Respect

Lord, teach my grandchild to respect themselves and everyone around them, regardless of differences in opinion, culture, or background. May they grow up understanding the value of mutual respect in relationships.



SHARING OUR FAITH WITH OUR GRANDCHILDREN

Finding ways to keep in touch with our grandchildren is more important than ever these days, as our families become further dispersed, and society places less and less importance on the Christian message of love and hope. Here are just a few ideas you might enjoy while strengthening those beautiful and unique relationships that we share with our grandchildren.

Ten ways to share your faith with your grandchildren

- Read the Bible together. Charity Aid to the Church in Need (acnuk.org) have some wonderful children's Bibles that bring the Bible stories to life in a very accessible way - with great illustrations. The Catholic Truth Society also has some very good children's book aimed at preschoolers and children of primary school (www.ctsbooks.org) explaining what they will see and hear at Mass.
- Keep an ongoing prayer journal with your grandchild recording things you are each thankful for.
- Share your favourite Bible verses or passages, and why they are special to you.

- Go to church together.
- Prepare meals together, it's a powerful chance to chat and come together.
- Talk about your relationship with God and what it means to you.
- Write 'thank you' notes and post them - children very rarely get things through the post these days; they will be thrilled.
- Pray for another family member together.
- Go for a hike, star-gaze, or cloud-gaze - use the shared time together to talk about God's creation.

Some of these suggestions may not be possible for different reasons, please remember, we do what we can - these are just a few ideas. Is there a special way that you like to share your faith with your grandchildren? If so, please email me; **E: simon.south@abdiocese.org.uk**. And let's help each other as we work to carry out our unique calling!

GRANDPARENTS' GROUPS ACROSS THE DIOCESE:

Are your parish grandparents looking for something new?

A message from Christine Evans, Grandparents' Groups Co-ordinator

Why do people choose to be in Grandparent groups? The answer is, in many cases, the reality that grandparents often have a common purpose, and being together can strengthen resolve in the midst of life's ups and downs.

One group might exist so that its members can be with like-minded people whose company they enjoy, another group might come together so members can give and receive support, understanding, and empathy. Grandparents' groups exist for all these reasons. Our common denominators are our faith and our fervent desire that our grandchildren will share in all the joys which our faith gives us. We join together to pray, to deepen our faith, to socialise, to support each other and to share our experiences; all in trust and confidence.

Our Grandparents' Network mission is to pass on our faith to our grandchildren; in many family situations this is not easy, but we are aware that we 'preach without words'. Our grandchildren pick up on how we live our lives, seeing that our faith gives us hope, strength, love of life. To strengthen this faith, we feed ourselves in our group times: listening to speakers, watching religious videos or sharing reflections, opening us to deeper understanding of our faith and a better ability to pass this on to our grandchildren.

Contact Christine to find out more;
E: cevansuk@btinternet.com

St Mary Star of the Sea, Hastings, and the Good Shepherd parish, St Leonard's, Grandparent and Older Persons' Group

David and Johanna Giles, Grandparent Group Leaders in Hastings and St Leonards write:

Christine and Mike Evans and our former Marriage and Family Life Adviser, Katherine Bergin, visited Hastings and St Leonard's parishes in November 2022 to give a presentation to people interested in joining our Grandparent and Older Persons' Group. It was well attended, with our first meeting held in January 2023.

We now meet regularly on the third Wednesday of every month after the 10am Mass at St. Mary's for light refreshments and a chat. Occasionally we have a speaker who will talk about their experiences with children or topics which may be of interest to the group. Otherwise we meet informally to share our experiences, and occasional challenges, as grandparents and how best to help our grandchildren.

Our programme, often given by members of our group and in no particular order, has included:

- The importance of connections between grandparents and grandchildren.
- How children learn.
- Nurturing the spirituality of children.
- Spiritual experiences in Medjugorje.
- Life in African schools as an illustrator of children's books
- Living with climate change.
- The Shroud of Turin and Science.
- Addressing the challenges faced by grandparents followed by a group discussion.

A small group of us have, of course, attended the Grandparents' Pilgrimage to West Grinstead with the Bishop which is always a day to look forward to and is well organised. We have also distributed the Carlo Acutis prayer cards as the internet comes up a lot as a concern for parents and grandparents. To find out more about our group please contact

E: hastings@abdiocese.org.uk or
E: stleonards@abdiocese.org.uk

A CHRISTMAS TRADITION - THE JESSE TREE

A lovely way to tell the stories of the Bible this Christmas with your grandchildren could be using a Jesse tree. It is a great activity for the whole family to get together and both make and learn this Advent.

The Jesse tree represents Jesus' family tree. The name is taken from Isaiah 11:1, in which Jesus is referred to as a "shoot coming up from the stump of Jesse", the father of King David.

Building a Jesse tree with your grandchildren is a great way to share the roots of your family and to share the stories of Jesus' family too. As we create a Jesse tree during this Advent season, we can take that moment to slow down, become creative, have fun with our family and learn about our faith together.

How to make a Jesse tree

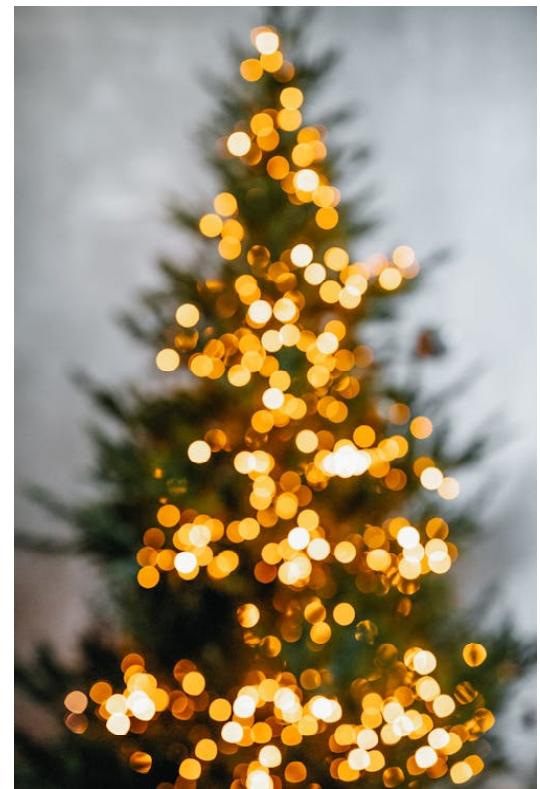
First, take a large, bare branch or live Christmas tree and secure it in a pot of sand or rocks. (You could also use a large potted plant or Christmas tree). You will make the ornaments together.

Instead of hanging all the ornaments on the tree at one time, you may want to hang one on every other day of Advent. Spend this wonderful time with your grandchildren and read the Scripture stories together as you make each ornament or as you hang them on the tree. Spending time with your grandchildren, being creative together and sharing the words and stories of our Christian heritage and God's ongoing story of His Revelation through history, leading to the birth of His only begotten Son and the story of Christ.

For more details on how to make your Jesse tree with your grandchildren have a look at the Diocesan webpage:

www.abdiocese.org.uk/news/jesse-tree-and-crib

We hope you have a truly wonderful, creative and blessed Advent.



**For more information on
Grandparents' Groups and Marriage
and Family Life matters in the
Diocese, contact:**

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