



COURTESY OF CATHERINE WILEY

Catherine Wiley and her husband, Stewart, receive a special blessing from Pope Francis during the “Family, Live the Joy of Faith” pilgrimage that drew 250,000 pilgrims to Rome on Oct. 27-28, 2013.

A call to Grandparents

How Catholic grandparents are getting help to pass on the faith.

Interview by Felix Carroll

Pope Francis has placed family matters at the center of his pontificate, as evidenced by the Extraordinary Synod on the Family, held Oct. 5-19 (see story, page 8). A friend of the Marian Fathers — and a special guest at the Divine Mercy Sunday celebration in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, last April — Catherine Wiley has dedicated her life to the cause of keeping faith at the heart of family life. She’s the founder of the Catholic Grandparents Association (CGA). We spoke with her about her ministry.

What is the goal of the Catholic Grandparents Association?

The purpose is to help grandparents pass on the faith to their grandchildren and to value and support them in this role. This is not easy in this day and age. Most of my own generation grew up surrounded by people of faith. In many cases, that’s no longer true for children growing up these days. To help

fill the gap, CGA organizes pilgrimages; we hold prayer appeals; we promote grandparents days in schools; and we promulgate the Universal Prayer for Grandparents, composed in 2008 for us by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. We also hold seminars and workshops. In short, the Association does everything it can to raise awareness of the great vocation of grandparents.

How many countries has the Association reached?

We’re now established in Ireland, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Malta, the Philippines, and Japan. Just this year, we have introduced the CGA to the United States, with its headquarters in Boca Raton, Florida. We now have more than 12,000 grandparents who attend the Annual National Grandparents Pilgrimage in Knock, Ireland, every year.

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How did your ministry begin?

It started more than 10 years ago. I knelt in prayer on Our Lady's birthday and asked her what I, as a mother and a grandmother of 10 beautiful grandchildren, could possibly give her as a present. The answer came in the recognition that I should honor her parents, *St. Anne* and *St. Joachim*, who were the grandparents of Jesus. I realized I needed to start somewhere, so I spoke with and enlisted the help of a number of key people, both clergy and laity.

What are the greatest challenges grandparents face in passing on the faith?

The world and the Church passes by way of the family, so when the Church is weakened, the family is weakened, and when the family is weakened, society is weakened. We need to build up the kingdom of God on earth. There is a real danger that we will be the generation that breaks the chain of faith going back to the early Church. Maybe we think it's up to somebody else to pass on the faith, or we take it for granted that it's being done by somebody else when, in fact, maybe it's not.

Explain the potential that grandparents have to evangelize the next generation.

We live in unprecedented times of broken and fragmented families, and grandparents

Excerpt from Papal 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, guardians 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.

— Pope Benedict XVI, 2008

tend to be a fixed point in a fast-changing and often confusing world. Often the grandparent may be the only person in their grandchild's life who is a believing, practicing Christian. We

Discover God's mercy when grieving a child



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