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Pope Francis holds the hand of an older woman whose head is wrapped in a scarf as he bless

Pope Francis greets an elderly woman as he meets with people in Asuncion, Paraguay, in this July 12, 2015, file photo. The pope has chosen the theme, "In old age they will still bear fruit" (Psalm 92:15), for the second World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly July 24. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

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God wants young people to bring joy to the hearts of the elderly and to learn from their experiences, Pope Francis said.

"Yet, above all, the Lord wants us not to abandon the elderly or to push them to the margins of life, as tragically happens all too often in our time," the 86-year-old pope wrote in his message for the Catholic Church's celebration of the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly.

The message was released at the Vatican June 15 in anticipation of the celebration July 23, the Sunday closest to the July 26 feast of Sts. Joachim and Anne, Jesus' grandparents.

The theme for 2023 is "His mercy is from age to age" from the Gospel of St. Luke.

The Holy Spirit "blesses and accompanies every fruitful encounter between different generations: between grandparents and grandchildren, between young and old," the pope wrote in his message.

"To better appreciate God's way of acting, let us remember that our life is meant to be lived to the full, and that our greatest hopes and dreams are not achieved instantly but through a process of growth and maturation, in dialogue and in relationship with others," he wrote.

"Those who focus only on the here and now, on money and possessions, on 'having it all now,' are blind to the way God works," the pope said in his message. "His loving plan spans past, present and future; it embraces and connects the generations."

God calls on everyone each day to look to the future and "keep pressing forward," he wrote.

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For young people, that means being able to "break free from the fleeting present in which virtual reality can entrap us, preventing us from doing something productive," he wrote. "For the elderly, it means not dwelling on the loss of physical strength and thinking with regret about missed opportunities" and dwelling on the past.

Francis invited the faithful to "make a concrete gesture that would include grandparents and the elderly" and to honor them, "neither depriving ourselves of their company nor depriving them of ours. May we never allow the elderly to be cast aside!"

Because World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, is scheduled for Aug. 1-6, soon after the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, the pope asked young people preparing for the event to visit their grandparents or an elderly person who lives alone and ask for their prayers.

"Their prayers will protect you and you will carry in your heart the blessing of that encounter," he wrote.

He asked all elderly people to pray for young people, who "are God's answer to your prayers, the fruits of all that you have sown, the sign that God does not abandon his people, but always rejuvenates them with the creativity of the Holy Spirit."

The pope invited the world's dioceses, parishes, Catholic associations and communities to help make the day "a joyful and renewed encounter between young and old."

The Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life said in a communique released the same day that pastoral tools useful in the preparation of the world day were available on its website, laityfamilylife.va.

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