

# This Christmas, ask the elderly for the gift of wisdom



Every year around this time, I can count on a handful of things to happen in my home and within my family. I'll list a few in no particular order.

- We will always and forever be unprepared for the first snowfall of the season, leaving us scrambling to find appropriately sized boots, snow pants, gloves, etc., so that our darlings can frolic for 15 or 20 minutes in the dusting of wet, sloppy snow.
- No matter how many times we've put up Christmas lights on our house and bushes, we can never easily solve the puzzle of how they all string together. After 18 years of living in our house, it shouldn't take a master electrician to figure out how and where to plug it all in, but here we are. Again.
- I know the barrage of text messages are coming, and I dread them more than anything else during the holiday season. They will all say the same thing: "Let me know what your kids want for Christmas."

It's that last one that I dread the most. I'd rather be stuck in a hot, crowded elevator with Paul McCartney's "Wonderful Christmastime" on repeat than have to coordinate the Christmas lists of six kids for four or five sets of gift-givers. More than never having the right size (or matching) boots, or having to work up an electrical blueprint for our Christmas lights, these lists really are the bane of my holidays. It's why I smiled a bit when I was perusing the news and came across a truly wonderful solution.

In late November, the Vatican announced [a new initiative it is calling "A Gift of Wisdom"](#) in which the Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life is encouraging young people (like the six children who sleep under my roof) to reach out to their elderly family members and neighbors and receive the most precious gifts they can get from them: their wisdom, their experience, their stories.

"This year, in the particular climate in which we are living, there is an opportunity for young people to receive a special gift," the dicastery said in a release. "Because of the pandemic, there are more elderly people who live alone. We can create bonds with each of them. This is a treasure waiting to be discovered!"

The dicastery is asking young people to share these "gifts of wisdom" on social media by using the hashtag #aGiftofWisdom. The program is the latest effort from the Vatican to get a younger generation to think about and interact with the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when so many are living in isolation. In July, it promoted a campaign entitled "The elderly are your grandparents," in which young people were encouraged to send a "virtual hug" to elderly friends or relatives through phone calls, emails, handwritten letters or safe, socially distant visits.

While the pandemic has been difficult for so many across the world, it has taken a significant toll on the elderly. Because they are especially vulnerable to the virus, many have wisely isolated themselves, but in doing so, they have sacrificed much of the social interaction that injected joy into their lives – community events at their parishes, dinners with friends, monthly poker games or book clubs, Sunday visits with children and grandchildren, and more. And while we engage with the busyness of our daily lives – working, or finding boots, or setting up Christmas lights, or trying to manage Christmas lists – they are waiting for a text message, or a phone call, or a video chat that lets them know that while they might be

isolated, they aren't forgotten.

So as Christmas nears and I make wish lists for each of the kids, I'll encourage their grandparents to give the gift of wisdom by writing a letter to each offering them bits of knowledge they've accumulated over the years, or problems they've faced, or their proudest moments, or memories of when they were that grandchild's age. And then I'll have my kids reach out, to ask questions, to seek advice, to remind their grandparents that not only are they not forgotten, but that they are truly loved.

What a gift that will be.

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