

**Education for
Community Life**

Country Focus: Greece

The Gifts of the Elderly

That the elderly, sustained by families and Christian communities, may apply their wisdom and experience to spreading the faith and forming new generations.

This month we encourage our elders to share the gifts of their life lessons and hand on the Christian faith they have received to the next generations.



Greece is located along the Mediterranean Sea and has been called the birthplace of Western civilization and the cradle of the democratic form of government. Greek language and culture spread all around the Mediterranean and even into Europe during the Roman Empire.

The Gospel writers and St. Paul prepared their writings in Greek as Christianity spread through the Greek-speaking world.

In the 4th century, the eastern half of the Roman Empire broke off with the center established in Greek Constantinople.

It eventually became the Byzantine Empire and in time, this fell to the Ottoman Empire. Greece gained independence in 1821.

Today, the Greek Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church are not in full communion, but continue to dialogue about our shared faith that comes to us from the Apostles.



**Promoting Knowledge
of Faith**

God's Word for Mission

*“Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you; your elders and they will explain it to you”
(Deuteronomy 32:7).*

“Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding” (Job 12:12)?

*“Elderly help us to see human affairs with greater wisdom... because they are the guardians of our collective memory...and common values”
(Pope John Paul II, 1999).*

A Saint for Mission: St. Jeanne Jugan



Jeanne Jugan was born in France in 1792 during the French Revolution. When she was a teenager, Jeanne worked as a maid and was led by the woman of the house to visit the sick and elderly of the village. There she learned how faith was practiced by loving her neighbor.

Eventually, Jeanne worked for an elderly woman. They prayed together and performed works of charity together. They also invited children into the home to teach them the Catholic faith. After the elderly woman died, Jeanne and two other women rented a small cottage where they devoted themselves to prayer and serving people in need, especially the elderly. Soon after, Jeanne invited a blind elderly widow into their home to live with them.

This act of living with and caring for the elderly led Jeanne and other women to form a religious community for that purpose. They became known as the Little Sisters of the Poor. Jeanne took the religious name of St. Mary of the Cross and became their first superior. She and her community would beg for money in the streets and go door to door. Jeanne spent her retirement in prayer and encouraged the young nuns to see Jesus in every needy person they met. She died in 1879 and the Church declared Jeanne a saint in October, 2009. Today she is the patron saint of the elderly, and her Little Sisters of the Poor serve more than 13,000 senior persons in 32 countries, including St. Paul, Minnesota. Her feast day is August 30th.

Human Dignity



The Catholic Church teaches that maintaining and enhancing the dignity of every person is the cornerstone of all the social justice teachings and principles. Every society is judged by how well it defends the rights and dignity of its most vulnerable citizens. Materialism and the need for economic success in a capitalist system cannot come at the expense of the dignity and right to food, shelter, education, health care and employment of all individuals.

The people of Greece have been suffering much hardship because of their economic crisis. Thousands have lost lost jobs, and many fathers have had to

leave their families behind to seek work in other countries. There has been a substantial increase in people seeking assistance for food and clothing, let alone education and health care.

Many Syrian and Iraqi refugees have flooded into Greece to escape a brutal war. Yet when faced with the huge influx of refugees, many Greek citizens have opened their homes to help these desperate people.

They understand the need to provide for others, even when they themselves struggle. Many Greeks are providing what they can to uphold the dignity of the refugees. Watch the video below of Panayiota.

Promoting Dignity of Those in Need



Watch: Generous Greek grandmother opens home to Syrian refugees

Panayiota, an 82-year old, Greek grandmother who has experienced poverty herself, opens her home to refugee Syrians fleeing war. A remarkable story of compassion and solidarity.

1. Why does Panayiota help the struggling refugees? What has she experienced?
2. How does Panayiota promote the dignity of the refugees she meets?
3. What are some ways that the Syrians show their gratitude?
4. How do they communicate even though they do not speak each other's language?
5. What are some recent examples in our own country where disasters have challenged the human dignity of citizens and what are some things that Christians can do to help? alleviate the suffering?

Mission Petitions

- ✦ Let us pray that the elderly may share their wisdom in spreading the faith and forming next generations.
- ✦ Let us pray for a deeper appreciation for our elders and ancestors who handed on the faith to us by their words and witness.
- ✦ Let us pray for the Greek people who first received the Gospel and handed it on to the world.
- ✦ Let us pray that we may serve and see the face of Jesus in the poor, the sick, the elderly and the homeless.

Loving God, I offer you myself this day and pray that I may love you and serve you in all I say and do. You gave us the gift of your Son, Jesus, as a sign of your love. Help us to receive the gift of Jesus into our lives this Christmas. May we seek his face in those we love and serve in your name; who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen