

Will it be grandparents who save the faith?



One woman from Ireland is counting on it. She's entrepreneur Catherine Wiley, who has founded the Catholic Grandparents Association, and now bishops around the world are asking her to set up branches in their diocese.

Upon returning to her native Mayo, Catherine organised a grandparents' pilgrimage in Knock in 2006, which 5,000 people attended. Cardinal Séan Brady blessed it and, at Catherine's request, Pope Benedict XVI wrote a prayer for grandparents in 2006, the first of its kind in the history of the Church. At the 2007 Knock pilgrimage some 10,000 grandparents attended.

"Soon the grandparents' pilgrimages became my main focus," she explains. "My family said: 'For God's sake, give it up!' But I wouldn't. I had seen the response of the grandparents and recognised the need in them and in myself. For example, I didn't have any answers when a member of my family turned around to me and said: 'I'm not going to baptise my children.' I didn't know what to do. I had never thought I would have a situation where my children would reject the faith or that I'd have to worry about my grandchildren's faith."

Catherine founded the Catholic Grandparents Association in 2009. "An astonishing 14,000 people attended its launch in Knock. Since then we've had events in England, Scotland, Australia, America and Tanzania. However, I think being asked to speak at [the International Eucharistic Congress in] Dublin and [the World Family Congress] in Milan really marked the coming of age of the association. It showed that the importance of grandparents is now recognised at the highest levels of the Church.

"Cardinal Dolan in New York said he wants to see the CGA active in his archdiocese. Likewise, Cardinal Pell of Sydney, Cardinal O'Malley of Boston and Cardinal Daet of the Philippines all said they want it in their dioceses. I was overwhelmed by the extraordinary interest in the CGA. I was approached by people from all over the world who want to set up a branch. Ordinary grandparents anywhere in the world can do so easily. All they need to do is to contact us and we'll give them materials and advice on getting started.

“The faith of our forefathers is hanging in the balance, especially in the western world. Grandparents have a special role to play in passing it on to their grandchildren. If we don’t act now, it may be too late, as quite often our own children have little knowledge of the faith. I truly believe that grandparents are being called at this moment in history.

Greg Kandra