



Grandparent Gatherings

Starting a Parish Branch of the
Catholic Grandparents Association

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Mission Statement of the Catholic Grandparents Association

To support all grandparents in:

- ❖ acknowledging their vital role in the family
- ❖ developing loving relationships with their grandchildren
- ❖ handing on their faith to a younger generation
- ❖ striving toward these aims within a community centered on prayer

A Place of Trust, Prayer, Community, and Support

The Catholic Grandparents Association is for grandparents. Each branch is intended to address the needs of its members. That means the suggestions given in this handbook are simply that—suggestions. We encourage you to allow your Gathering Group to develop into an organic, sincere, and supportive group. Keep your group focused on prayer, on recalling your vocation as a grandparent, on your love of God, and on your desire to pass your faith onto your grandchildren. Allow your community to be one of welcome, support, trust, and prayer. Tailor your gatherings to support these goals. Do not feel restricted by the recommendations in this handbook. Instead consider them a starting point and make any adjustments to best fit the needs of your group.

Organizing a New Branch

1. Contact your parish priest about starting a new branch of CGA and set up a date to speak at Sunday Mass to explain what the CGA is.
2. In the weeks leading up to the Mass, put an announcement in the parish newsletter about the creation of a new Grandparent Gathering group, first CGA gathering, and your contact information for anyone with questions.
3. Make sure to put a second announcement in the newsletter with the all of the details about the first meeting of the new CGA branch (place, date, and time).
4. After the talk at Mass, stay around to hand out CGA info cards and to speak with anyone who may have questions.
5. During the meeting, collect everyone's contact information to have amongst yourselves as a community of faith and support.
6. Register your new branch with the Catholic Grandparent's Association by email, website, or post.

A Typical Schedule of a Grandparent Gathering

Welcome

Begin with tea and biscuits and a few minutes to greet one another and socialize.

Opening prayer

As the official start to the gathering, light a candle and pray the Pope's Prayer for Grandparents. Quiet your hearts and minds from the rest of life recalling the many graces God gives us, particularly our grandchildren.

News

Life is always busy, so take a minute or two to sum up anything that has happened recently or since the group last met. This can mean events in which grandparents have participated, family news (a new grandchild was born), or anything else a member wants to share with the group. This is also a good time to remind the group that as a place of faith, trust, and support, it is important to keep the conversations private and confidential.

Conversation

With everyone focused on the Lord, begin the conversation for the week. Choose a question to discuss, something to read together and reflect on, talk about an area of struggle as a grandparent. Look to the Resource Appendix for Gathering Conversation ideas and questions.

Reflection

If it is relevant for the group, offer a few minutes for individual reflection. Encourage everyone to pray silently, in small groups, or jotting down a few thoughts. As a way to bring everyone back together, one person can offer a brief prayer thanking God for the time of Conversation and Reflection.

Planning

As a branch of the CGA, it is great to plan events or activities that get us involved with our grandparents. Talk about anything that needs to be discussed or announced for upcoming events. Now is also a good time to send around a small collection basket to pay for the shared tea and biscuits. Before concluding, pick a topic for the next meeting's conversation, so everyone has the opportunity to prepare individually through whatever means (thinking, praying, reading, etc.)

Closing Prayer

As a community centred on prayer, close the gathering with a heartfelt prayer.

Your First Gathering

Since this is the very first gathering, things will need to be just a little different from a typical gathering. The most crucial part of this meeting is beginning to develop a community of faith, trust, and prayer. The secondary goal of this meeting is establishing the structure of your particular branch of the Catholic Grandparents Association.

Welcome

Create a warm and comfortable space to hold your first gathering. Maybe arrange chairs in a circle. Have tea, coffee, and biscuits available as people arrive. Greet people as they come in. If you would like, provide blank nametags, so people can write their names on them as they arrive. Allow people to socialize and become comfortable for the first ten or fifteen minutes. At that point if people have not headed to the chairs, lead the way by sitting down in your circle and suggesting you officially begin the first gathering.

Opening prayer

As a community of prayer, it is essential to begin your first gathering in prayer. Introduce the Pope's Prayer for Grandparents telling others that it is one of a kind. It was written specially for all grandparents at the request of the Catholic Grandparents Association. Its creation affirms the vocation of all grandparents as faithful stewards of faith and your importance in the family. If you have copies of the prayer, invite everyone to recite the prayer together as one person lights the candle. Or if you would rather, recite the prayer alone. Take a moment of personal reflection as the prayer ends to embrace the presence of God and welcome his guidance into the gathering.

Introductions and Meeting the Family

As a community with prayer and support at its core, it is important to get to know each other and build bonds as soon as possible. Allow each grandparent or couple to introduce themselves and tell a little bit about their family and grandchildren (names, ages, etc.). Encourage others to show pictures of their family (if they have any with them) while describing their families. You may find it useful to have each grandparent draw up a family tree beginning with him/herself and extending to their grandchildren. (Make sure to have paper and pens if you decide to do this).

Conversation

Before you begin this open and honest discussion, establish that this community is one of trust. Talk about the need to be open and honest with one another. It is essential that everyone feels comfortable sharing with one another. Ask that everyone keeps all conversations at Gatherings private. You may want to say something like, "We are all here to share with one another and support one another through conversation and prayer. We need to be able to be open and honest with one another. We need to be able to trust one another. Having this trust means that what we talk about here will always be kept private. Let us always be respectful of each others feelings and be supportive. This opportunity offers us a chance to talk about being grandparents and to pray for our grandchildren, but we also have the chance to

develop real relationships within our group. Now let's turn to talk about what brought us all here today." Now that everyone has met, it is a great time to talk about: *why did you come to the Grandparent Gathering today? What do you hope to get from being a member? What is one thing you struggle with or think about as a grandparent?* This conversation will help you engage in honest conversation. Take the lead in being open and even a little vulnerable. It can be difficult to tell others the problems you are facing or the things that scare you, but if you are willing to trust the others in the group, they will follow your example of honesty and openness. Talking about these questions offers a perfect transition into the next topic for consideration.

Structuring YOUR Group

Before you end your Gathering today, you need to discuss and decide how you will meet in the future. This means considering time, place, length of gathering, how frequently, etc. For more help on establishing the logistics of your group, turn to Thinking About Your Gathering on page 11.

Planning

As a branch of the CGA, it is great to plan events or activities that get us involved with our grandparents. Talk about anything that needs to be discussed or announced for upcoming events. Now is also a good time to send around a small collection basket to pay for the shared tea and biscuits. Before concluding, pick a topic for the next meeting's conversation, so everyone has the opportunity to prepare individually through whatever means (thinking, praying, reading, etc.)

Closing Prayer

As a community centered on prayer, close the gathering with a heartfelt prayer.

Thinking about your Gathering

This is your gathering. Anything that is listed in the next several pages is merely a suggestion. Especially during your first meeting, talk about what everyone wants from your regular gatherings.

Just a few things you may want to consider:

- How often will you meet?
 - Weekly (if members can commit to this, it is great, but if it is not doable that is ok too.)
 - Every other week
 - Once a month (we recommend you meet at least once a month)
- Where will you gather?
 - The parish hall (everyone knows where it is)
 - One person's home (this can be a big commitment from someone, but the home creates a great environment of comfort and trust)
 - Rotating homes (Again homes are warm, loving places. This option also gives you the chance to see each other in their own space. A great way to build trust)
- When will you gather?
 - Tuesdays (It is the day dedicated to St Anne, the mother of Mary and grandmother of Jesus)
 - After a Sunday or weekday Mass
 - Over lunch or tea
- How long will you spend together?
 - We recommend 1 - 1 ½ hours (but feel free to go longer if you like)
- What is each person looking for in belonging to the Grandparent Gathering?
 - Affirmation and support
 - Comparing experiences, successes, and challenges of grandparenting
 - Prayer and reflection

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.

Lord Jesus,
help families and society
to value the presence and roles of grandparents.
May they never be ignored or excluded,
but always encounter respect and love.
Help them to live serenely and to feel welcomed
in all the years of life which you give them.
Mary, Mother of all the living,
keep grandparents constantly in your care, accompany
them on their earthly pilgrimage,
and by your prayers, grant that all families
may one day be reunited in our heavenly homeland,
where you await all humanity for the great
embrace of life without end. Amen!

Pope Benedict XVI

Other Suggested Prayers

Prayer to St. Anne and St. Joachim

St. Anne and St. Joachim,
you were especially favoured by God,
on the threshold of the New Testament,
to be the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God.
You provided your daughter
with a loving home, family and faithful teaching,
and brought her up
to be the worthy Mother of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Your way of parenting was for her an example
to bring forth the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus,
treasuring all things in her heart. (cf. *Lk* 2.19, 51)
Your faith laid the foundation of courage and strength
that allowed Mary to stand by the Cross as her son was crucified
and to still believe. (cf. *Jn* 19.25-27)
In communion with Mary and Joseph,
intercede to your grandson Jesus for all parents,
so that they may help their children, to grow in strength and in knowledge
and to discover the mission that God entrusts to them
in the world and in the Church.

Good St. Anne,
Mother of Mary, the Blessed one among women, (cf. *Luke* 1.42)
you were thanked by the newcomers on this glorious and free land

for your protecting intercession during their uncertain voyage across the ocean.
and you were invoked by them
in their trials and in establishing new homes and traditions.
Intercede for all our families
so that, through the help of the Holy Spirit,
we may grow together in peace and understanding
and make our home hospitable to our visitors and guests.
May we persevere, like you, in the love of Jesus and Mary
and live pure and blameless lives in the sight of God.

Grandmother of Jesus, our Saviour,
you were honoured by the First Nations people of this land
in your role of nurturing him and bring him up to maturity.
Intercede for all grandmothers,
so that they may nurture their grandchildren with love and wisdom,
teaching them to find their way in life
and to be right in word and in deed.

Gentle St. Joachim,
Father of the Virgin Handmaid of the Lord, (cf. *Luke 1.38*)
Grandfather of Jesus,
among your descendants, you had the privilege
to count the One whom your own ancestors longed to see,
the long expected Messiah.
Intercede for all elders and grandfathers,
who worked hard on this land, defending its integrity,
and who grew old in the service of the Almighty.

May God grant them
to benefit from their remaining strength,
to share the wealth of their experience and wisdom
and to enter his Kingdom at the end of their earthly time.

Good St. Anne and St. Joachim,
Parents of Mary, the “favoured one,” (Luke 1.28)
accompany us, in our faith journey on this land,
to the glory and praise of God,
now and for ever and ever. Amen.

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Reading List

Below is a list of books that may be helpful to any grandparent. The list has a wide range of topics and purposes. This list is mostly for individual use, but some Gathering Groups may want to read a book together and discuss it during a gathering. This list is only an introduction to the many books written about grandparenting and faith.

Understanding Your Grandchildren

Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults

By Christian Smith and Patricia Snell

Being a Spiritual Influence

Praying the Scriptures for Your Teenagers: Discover How to Pray God's Will for Their Lives

By Jodie Berndt

Tending the Heart of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination

By Vigen Gurorian

Written by an Eastern Orthodox theologian, lists books and stories that emphasize values, morality stemming from God

Praying the Scriptures for Your Children

By Jodie Berndt

The Power of a Praying Parent Book of Prayers

By Stormie Omartian

Spending Time with Your Grandchildren

Toad Cottages and Shooting Stars: Grandma's Bag of Tricks

By Sharon Lovejoy

Written by a grandma about activities to do with grandchildren to make memories

GrandLoving: Making Memories with Your Grandchildren

By Sue Johnson

Experience of Being a Grandparent

Chicken Soup for the Grandma's Soul

Chicken Soup for the Soul: Grand and Great: Grandparents and Grandchildren Share Their Stories of Love and Wisdom

Chicken Soup for the Grandparent's Soul: Stories to Open the Hearts and Rekindle the Spirits of Grandparents
By Jack Canfield

Eyes of My Heart: 27 Writers Reveal the Hidden Pleasures and Perils of Being a Grandmother
By Barbara Graham

Know Me, Hold Me, Sing to Me: What My Grandchild Taught Me About God
By Kathleen Chesto

Particular Issues

Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families & Churches
By Russell D. Moore

Long-Distance Grandparenting: Connecting with Your Grandchildren from Afar
By Willma Willis Gore

The Essential Grandparent: A Guide to Making a Difference
By Dr. Lillian Carson

Grow Old Along with Me
By Albert Jewell

What's Next

At this point the framework has been laid. Your group has decided on the logistics and has set a tempo for future gatherings. Now it is time to address what you will do during these gatherings. As mentioned in the introduction, this is your group, this is your space, and this is your time. Do whatever it is that will build up you and your group spiritually and support your vocation as grandparents. If that means group prayer, do that. If it means discussing current situations with your grandchildren, do that. If it means studying catechesis for children, do that. Below is a list of topics and suggestions that can be used as a brainstorming list of discussion topics, activities, and other ideas for gatherings. Supplemental resources (many of which are included in this list) can be found on our website www.catholicgrandparentsassociation.com. They can also be found on our Facebook page or linked to the Passing on the Faith Project page of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales.

- Discuss
 - Divorce or separation
 - Working parents
 - Living far away from grandchildren
 - Experience of being a grandparent
 - Remembering your own grandparents
 - Being a parent vs. being a grandparent
- Read and talk
 - Choose a book related to grandparenting or faith and read it (or part of it). Talk about it during your gathering
 - Study a Bible passage about family or grandparents
 - Read the recent encyclical on family
- Plan an event
 - A Day of Prayer retreat.
 - Stations of the Cross
 - Mardi Gras Party for Parish Youth Group
 - Afternoon Tea with Grandkids
 - Grandparents Mass celebrating St. Joachim and St. Anne
- Do
 - Pray for sick children
 - Write prayers or cards for your grandchildren
- Listen
 - To a priest
 - To a catechist on youth catechesis

- To a specialist on child development

Pilgrimages

The entirety of our lives is one great pilgrimage as we journey through, progressing ever closer to the joyful moment when we will come face to face with our Creator. Making an intentional pilgrimage propels us forward in our spiritual journey. We create a space to draw closer to God. In joining together as pilgrims, we also move closer to one another reflecting the oneness and unity that God desires of his people. The Catholic Grandparents Association grew out of individual Grandparent Pilgrimages in Ireland. For these reasons, participating in an annual Grandparents' Pilgrimage seems like an integral part of being a part of the CGA. An annual event like this also offers a chance for many branches to celebrate St. Anne and St. Joachim and grandparenting together. Grandparents should not keep such a wonderful day to themselves. It is a joy to share it with the entire family in a day of faith and fun.

Of course every branch may not be able to participate in a pilgrimage. Your branch may be the first in the area, or travel may make it too difficult to hold a pilgrimage. If a pilgrimage is not possible for your branch, consider planning a special Mass to celebrate the grandparents of Jesus and grandparenthood. This Mass can also be an event of faith and fun for the whole family as well. The possibilities are limitless, but Mass could be followed by tea and cake, a dinner or reception, or simply an opportunity for grandparents and grandchildren to play together. For more ideas and recommendations for planning a Grandparents' Pilgrimage or Mass, see the Grandparents' Pilgrimage or Mass supplement on the CGA website.

Additional Help and Resources

Being a part of a Grandparent Gathering is a wonderful way to pray for faith and families and explore your vocation of being a grandparent. It's possible, though, that in opening this way for discovery, you may unearth new questions or needs. The following is a list of groups and resources that you may (or may not) find helpful. Please let us know of others and also check the links on the Passing on the Faith website.

Celebrating Family project of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales

www.celebratingfamily.org.uk/

Passing on the Faith Grandparent webpage

www.passingonthefaith.org.uk/Grandparenting.html

Find your diocesan Family Ministry Coordinator

www.celebratingfamily.org.uk/familias_family_ministry.html

A Catholic faith site for kids to share and explore faith – for your own research or to share with your grandkids

www.yfaith.co.uk

Support for mental health (for you or someone you know)

www.mentalhealth.org.uk/

Please print this out and fill in the appropriate information. Send it to:

Catholic Grandparents Association
The Fairgreen
Westport, Co. Mayo
Ireland

This information will help us to count existing groups as well as to support your group in prayer and with resources and support. The information will only be used for CGA purposes and will not be given out to any other groups without explicit permission. Knowing this information will help us to help you in your efforts as grandparents and create networks among grandparents in various parishes, dioceses, and even countries.

This form is also available online. It can be found at www.catholicgrandparentsassociation.com and completed on the site. Alternatively, the form can be downloaded, completed, and emailed as an attachment to info@catholicgrandparentsassociation.com.

Branch and Parish Information	
Name of Branch	
Town	
County	
Parish	
Parish Address	
Parish Contact No.	
Parish Priest	
Frequency of Meeting	<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly <input type="checkbox"/> Weekly <input type="checkbox"/> _____
Location of Meeting	

Grandparent Contact People (min. of 2 persons)				
	Name	Phone No.	Email Address	Mailing Address
1				
2				
3				