

EDITORIAL

End of the Crescendo Network

In 1995, the meeting of two people concerned about the well-being of older people gave rise to a network project to promote humane and Christian ageing.

After 5 years of gestation, the project was formed: "To form a working group and propose it widely to International Catholic Organisations and other Church organisations concerned with the elderly".

This was followed by 22 years of rich and varied work.

In this newsletter you will find the main reflections and themes of all these years of work and the actions put in place:

Taking a stand at crucial moments, in particular at the United Nations General Assemblies on ageing.

Defending life and opposing euthanasia.

International meetings of families with their Congresses of grandparents and the elderly.

Targeted studies on dependent elderly people.

It has been an intense, rich work, paying close attention to the questions that have arisen over time in international life.

Crescendo has always been attentive to the texts and words of the Pope and the Holy See. It has also been attentive to the work of the Human Rights Council on Ageing in Geneva.

As the years went by, the initial enthusiasm and commitment sometimes waned. Organisations have left Crescendo over the years. Representatives have aged. The next generation is lacking. So, reluctantly, it has just been decided to dissolve the Network.

But it is important to look for other, more effective ways of serving the elderly. The call is out to everyone, individuals and groups: work on a new network that embodies the values of Christian ageing, those of the Gospel.

We would like to thank Alberto Marxuach for his initial impetus and all those who have contributed to the life and work of Crescendo over the past 22 years.

The Executive Committee

POST

The Crescendo World Network: 22 years of activity

Origins

The Crescendo World Network, founded in Paris on 9 July 2001, grew out of the 'Third Age' working group of the Conference of International Catholic Organisations (ICO) and its rapprochement with the Sister Superior of the Little Sisters of the Poor. Its aim is to stimulate creative and interactive links between organisations from different disciplines concerned with the promotion of human and Christian ageing.

As Alberto Marxuach, one of the founders, wrote in the first newsletter (November 2003): 'These are its first steps. Little by little, they will grow stronger thanks to the collaboration of those who are concerned about the fate of retired people and those who are aware of the major social challenge posed by the rapid ageing of the world's population.'



Alberto Marxuach

Both the human and the socio-economic issues are extremely complex and require a multidisciplinary approach... Crescendo's member organisations have different disciplines, but all are inspired by the Christian vision of man and his destiny.

The expression 'Crescendo' is taken from the exhortation CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI, no. 48: 'According to God's plan, every human being is a growing life, from the first spark of his existence to his last breath'. This growth is the meaning of the life cycle, which has its origin and its end in God.

This newsletter is intended primarily for the representatives of the ICOs that are members of Crescendo, so that they can distribute it as widely as possible within their associations. It is sent to the governing bodies of the Conference of ICOs, so that they can distribute it to other ICOs. Finally, it is sent to a number of Church bodies and NGOs whose aims are similar to those of Crescendo.

Objectives: Crescendo acts at international, national and local level to:

- Disseminate a positive image of ageing, inspired by the biblical vision of the person and of life.
- Promote and defend human dignity at all stages of life, without reducing it to criteria of profitability or usefulness.
- Encourage the active participation of retired and elderly people in the life of society and the Church.
- Promote family and intergenerational solidarity.
- Promote recognition of the growing importance of spiritual values at this stage of life.
- To publicise the documents that implement the guidelines of the Church and the United Nations on the dignity, rights, duties and mission of older people.
- To draw up a common strategy between all the ICOs, members of the network, in their relations with the UN on Ageing (Madrid April 2002).
- To work in this way, by, for and with older people, towards the emergence of a more humane society for all ages.

Composition of Crescendo in 2002: AMI (military), SIGNIS (communications), CI (Caritas Internationalis), CICIAMS (nurses), PSDP (Little Sisters of the Poor), Filles de la Sagesse, FIAMC (doctors), FIUC (universities), FIAC (Catholic Action), FIPC (pharmacists), MIAMSI (Catholic Action of Independent Milieus), UMOFC (women), VMI (retired people).

Main achievements

In **2002**, on the occasion of the second UN General Assembly on Ageing, Crescendo analysed the preparatory document for this GA and took a position in a message sent to the UN. Representatives of Crescendo's member organisations took part in the NGO Forum events. A presentation was made and a stand was set up.

January 2004: Appeal against euthanasia: Crescendo prepared a note on the Council of Europe's debates on euthanasia and sent it to interested ICOs (more than 100 people), so that they could report on it through their representatives and lobby.

He recalled the positions against euthanasia taken by the World Medical Association (WMA), the European Federation of Catholic Doctors (FEAMC) and the International Federation of Catholic Pharmacists (FIPC). The day before the vote in plenary, the proposal in favour of euthanasia was postponed indefinitely... This is the first time the report has been rejected.



Alain Lejeune (FIPC), François Blin (FIAMC)

January 2004: Crescendo takes part in the 10th anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

It invited the AIC representative to UNESCO and ECOSOC and coordinator of the Family Group of the

Conference of ICOs, with the intention of establishing a permanent link between this group and Crescendo.

The ICO/Family group has set itself the goal, within UNESCO's fields of competence, of promoting the family as the basic unit of society and the values it embodies. The group circulated a questionnaire. One hundred and fifty collective responses were received from fifty-four countries on five continents, representing a wide variety of experiences and cultures. A brochure entitled 'The Family, Good News for the Third Millennium' summarises the responses.



François Blin (FIAMC), Simone Gebs (MIAMSI), Sister Annick (Filles de la Sagesse), Françoise Gaudemar (AIC), Sister Anne (Petites Sœurs des Pauvres), Fernand Vincent (administrator)



Bernadette Cantenot (VMI), ??, Sister Anne (Petites Sœurs des Pauvres), Sister Annick (Filles de la Sagesse), Daniel Van Espen (SIGNIS), Françoise Gaudemar (AIC), Alberto Marxuach (VMI), François Blin (FIAMC)

October 2004: newsletter on intergenerational solidarity.

April 2005: bulletin on palliative care: In November 2004, the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care organised a congress in Rome on palliative care. Sister Anne, who attended, has summarised the main points of the conferences in an article entitled 'On the fringes of an International Congress on Palliative Care'.

October 2005: INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR in Geneva

'For fully human and Christian ageing'

In collaboration with the Centre Catholique International de Genève (CCIG): delegates from ICOs and congregations met with experts from various disciplines and ecumenical contributions. In the light of their presentations and with their collaboration, the participants were invited to evaluate the Crescendo project and to propose guidelines and priority areas for action. The aim was to clarify the network's identity, renew the commitment of its members and attract new members.

Just after the international seminar in Geneva, Crescendo organises a national symposium in collaboration with the Commission for the Elderly of the Archdiocese of Valencia (Spain) in preparation for grandparents' participation in the 5th World Meeting of Families, to be held in this city in **July 2006**.

A Congress of Grandparents and Older People was held as part of the **5th World Meeting of Families** in Valencia in July 2006. The project for this Congress and the process of

preparing it are the fruit of two years' work by the Crescendo Spain team, based on the guidelines of the Crescendo World Network, specified in the Geneva seminar in October 2005.

Conclusions of the congress: 'We, grandparents and elders, are aware that our mission within the family and in other environments is not over. We can never give up defending the values that give meaning to life and help us to grow into what we should be: the image of God.

Faced with the threats of the prevailing climate, we older people can bear witness to the fact that God never abandons us and, in fidelity to Him, we must, in the present moment, help in the search for the meaning of life in the light of a tomorrow that is already beginning to appear: in the midst of darkness, streaks of light point us towards Christ, who is always the same, yesterday, today and always'.

December 2007: 1st Forum of Catholic INGOs in Rome. Its aim: to promote a spirit of communion and cooperation between these organisations and with the Holy See. Crescendo's raison d'être is precisely to encourage INGOs of different charisms and disciplines to come together and work together on specific issues, in all their dimensions. Crescendo is present.

2008: Crescendo was present at these 3 events:

- The international congress organised by **the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Health Services** on the theme: 'Pastoral Care of the Elderly'.

- The congress organised by the **Pontifical Academy for Life**

- The Plenary Assembly of the **Pontifical Council for the Family**, on the theme: 'The family as transmitter of human and Christian values'.

End 2009: Distribution of a collection of texts on : 'Older People, especially Older and Lonely Women'. Texts analysing their situation in France, Italy, Holland, Madagascar, Cameroon, Nigeria, India, Lebanon, Vietnam, Mexico and Peru.

Composition of Crescendo in 2010: AIC, CI, CICIAMS, FIAMC, Filles de la Sagesse, Fondacio, MIAMSI, PSDP, SIGNIS, VMI

From 2010 to 2016, Father Joseph Joblin has contributed to Crescendo's reflections through some very significant contributions.



Father Joblin, Ecclesiastical Assistant (1920-2018)

Since 2011, Crescendo has paid close attention to the work of **the NGO Committee on Ageing in Geneva, particularly that of the independent expert.**

In **October 2013** a **questionnaire** was sent to the presidents of Crescendo's member associations concerning the **future of the Network**. It emerged that: Crescendo must continue and inform members about ageing-related issues. AIC expects Crescendo to provide information on how to approach their spirituality with older people. VMI would like Crescendo to bring its concern for older people to the international bodies of society and the Church.



Hélène Durand Ballivet, President since 2010

2014-2015: Efforts on communication: overhaul of the website and renewal of the newsletter:

The website became operational during the summer of 2014. Its aim: to

be a conveyor belt for communications between network members and the outside world.

The newsletter: new look, new frequency (3 times a year), new content, desire to widen its audience. An editorial committee has been set up. The newsletter is published simultaneously in French, English and Spanish. Each issue focuses on a theme, the subject of the main article. An editorial, information from member organisations, international institutions (mainly the Geneva NGO Committee on Ageing) and the Church (Holy See) complete it.

From 22 to 24 January 2015, the Pontifical Council for the Family organised an **International Congress of Family and Life Movements, Groups and Associations** to contribute to the debate ahead of the next Synod of Bishops on the Family in October 2015.

Vie Montante Internationale and Crescendo took part.

September 2015, 8th World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, Crescendo was represented by the Little Sisters of the Poor.

2017: We have reached a crucial moment in the history of Crescendo.

- We have a certain openness to the world: UN, Council of Europe, WHO.... But we feel a little out of step with the world. We're on the sidelines when it comes to civil society.
- The AGE Platform has some relevant ideas, but they're not spiritual. We need to find bridges.
- Spirituality is an integral part of our lives. We are witnesses to what we carry in our lives. But we're not active enough, we're not involved enough. We don't mesh with others.

IX. World Family Day from 21 to 26 August 2018 in Dublin on the theme 'The Gospel of the family, joy for the world.' We are represented by the Irish Little Sisters.

November 2018: Questions about the place of Crescendo, its usefulness. Conclusions:

- ☑ More flexibility, we have stayed too much within our borders, we have not called on others enough, not invited enough.
- ☑ Have we done enough to showcase our diversity of approaches within the network itself ? Synergy needs to be developed between partners with different approaches...
- ☑ Shouldn't we find another way of approaching this, in particular with other Christian bodies (and not just Catholics)?

Contact other Christian partners (e.g. the Diaconesses de Reuilly, but also the Daughters of Charity, etc.) by inviting them to a day, a few months before the General Meeting.

For what purpose? To listen to them, find out what they think, what they want, what they expect...

2019 : Further reflection: the idea of inviting people to a Crescendo '**re-foundation' day**. Who should be invited? International Catholic-inspired organisations working by, for and with older people. Discussion of Protestant and even non-denominational (humanist) organisations. The names of many organisations were mentioned.

It is important to **get in touch with the Vatican:** in particular with Dr Vittorio Scelzo, who is responsible for the 'young and old' office in the Department for the Laity, Family and Life.

January 2020: The richness of years International Congress on the Pastoral Care of the Elderly

Crescendo is well represented.

Here are the **conclusions of the Congress:** - Consider older people to be part of the greater People of God; they have special needs that we must take into account.

- The pastoral care of older people must be included in the new missionary season inaugurated by Pope Francis with *Evangelii Gaudium*: announcing the presence of Christ to older people, because the call to holiness is addressed to everyone, even to the elderly.

grandparents. It is essential to help them rediscover the meaning of their baptism in a particular phase of their lives';

- Valuing the gifts and charisms of older people, in charity work, in the apostolate and in the liturgy’;
- Support families and be there for them when they have to look after elderly grandparents’;
- Stop the culture of waste’. When people wonder whether their life is still useful or interesting to someone, well, there's a void there that the Church's pastoral care must fill’.
- To care for the spirituality of the elderly, so that, alongside piety and devotional practice, this spirituality is immersed in an authentic and profound spiritual relationship with God. The ageing person is not approaching the end, but rather needs to draw closer to God and the mystery of eternity’.

2020 : COVID year: The meeting, which was to be open to other organisations working for and with older people, planned for 1 October 2020, had to be cancelled. It had been carefully prepared.

July 2021: 1st World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly

2022: New questions about the future of Crescendo: Given our current strength, we can't take action. Can't we be **a bridge**? We want to promote the human and Christian aspect. How can we mobilise our organisations? How do we make contacts? We are all overwhelmed.

There is no equivalent to our Network in the service of older people. It is through Crescendo that we can have exchanges and therefore grow.

Our best tool is the **newsletter**. We can play a role in alerting people to the situation of older people. Work on intergenerational relations, on the vocation of older people.

Pope Francis has made a long series of **catecheses on old age, older people and their vocations**. We could use these very rich catecheses as a starting point, adding testimonies and asking readers questions. 3 subjects: the vocation of old age, intergeneration and social ties.

2023: Crescendo goes into pause mode, waiting for better days. The only activities that remain are the website and the newsletter.

January 2024: A consensus quickly emerged among those present that we had neither a project nor the means to carry it out. We had to dissolve.

An Extraordinary General Meeting is called for Tuesday 25 June 2024 at 2pm in Paris to decide whether or not to dissolve the Network. It will be held in person and on zoom.

It decided to dissolve the network.

Composition of Crescendo in 2024:
AIC, CICIAMS, MIAMSI, PSDP, VMI.

The photographs are by François Blin whom we warmly thank

The prehistory of a wonderful adventure!

In 1995, Alberto Marxuach, then President of VMI, had a very positive exchange with the Superior General of the Little Sisters of the Poor, who was visiting Rome, as he was. He felt encouraged in the project he was already working on: "To form a working group with the ICOs and other Church organisations concerned with the elderly".

On 14 October 1996, he organised his very first meeting, an "exploratory meeting" in the words of his letter of invitation. That day, in a classroom at the Spiritan Fathers' home on rue Lhomond in Paris, a number of representatives from national and international organisations came together. Alberto, Joëlle Coupel (Secours catholique), Geneviève de Diesbach (UMOFC, Union Mondiale des Organisations Féminines Catholiques), Louis Gaben (MCR/Vie montante, Mouvement chrétien des retraités, France), Professor Guy-Réal Thivierge (FIUC, International Federation of Catholic Universities), Luc Trouillard (Caritas Internationalis) and Sr Guillemette and Sr Sophie, Petites Sœurs des Pauvres, were present. Alberto's primary objective was to see how to coordinate preparatory actions for the UN Year of Older Persons in 1999. There was already talk of "considering the interest of forming a working group".

Other meetings followed, at which many ideas were put forward. In October 1997, the agenda included: "preparing the request for official recognition of this working group at the General Assembly of the Conference of ICOs" which was about to take place. Other organisations joined the group from that date, and then over the months. Alberto managed to arouse interest, to show that all the ICOs had, in one way or another, a link with the issues of ageing... Texts were drawn up, underlining the place and the richness of the elderly, the need for a Pastoral Care that takes them more into account, not just as people in need of assistance, and so on.

Following on from the International Year of Older Persons, it was decided to continue this joint work between international Catholic bodies. Finally, it was during the Jubilee of the Elderly in Rome on 16 September 2000 that the plan to form a Network was announced. On 8 and 9 June 2001, the founding meeting of the "Network for Human and Christian Ageing" was held, followed by the finalisation of a "Founding Act" and statutes. The name Crescendo was chosen (there had previously been suggestions of "Simeon and Anna", or "Nicodemus" (being reborn in old age)!

There were times over the years when we had the feeling that nothing was going to come of all this. But Alberto, with a Faith and Hope that amazed us - he always began with a time of prayer - and with a great sense of the Church, convinced of the strength of working together, kept us going with renewed vigour. It's really thanks to him that this project has been able to take shape!

an early participant