It's Beautiful to Be Old – key references and links

Key 1998 document from the Pontifical Council for the Laity, *The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and in the World* here: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/laity/documents/rc_pc_laity_doc_05021999_older-people_en.html

This document provides the basis and starting-point for our appraisal of current Church teaching. It is detailed and extensive but is primarily concerned with a single aspect of the topic under discussion: the role and pastoral needs of older people in the Church, its life and mission.

The main body of the document is however more radical, insofar as it reverses this order of priorities. Thus, it begins by challenging the accepted narrative of old age as a period of decline and loss of agency and proposing one in which old age is a time of distinctive charisms.

"It's beautiful to be old. … The quality of a society, I'd say of a civilization, is judged by how well it treats its elderly."

Benedict XVI Visit To The Community Of Sant'egidio's Home For The Elderly "Viva Gli Anziani" Rome Monday, 12 November 2012 http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2012/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20121112_viva-anziani.html

"This morning, addressing all the elderly in spirit, **although I am aware of the difficulties that our age entails I would like to tell you with deep conviction: it is beautiful to be old! At every phase of life it is necessary to be able to discover the presence and blessing of the Lord and the riches they bring. We must never let ourselves be imprisoned by sorrow!** We have received the gift of longevity. Living is beautiful even at our age, despite some "aches and pains" and a few limitations. In our faces may there always be the joy of feeling loved by God and not sadness. " . . ." The quality of a society, I mean of a civilization, is also judged by how it treats elderly people and by the place it gives them in community life. Those who make room for the elderly make room for life! Those who welcome the elderly welcome life!"

Pope Francis: General Audience of 11th March 2015:

"The elder is not an alien. We are that elder: in the near or far future,but inevitably, even if we don't think it." https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150304_udienza-generale.html

Stresses their mission and old age as a time of spiritual pilgrimage and growth:

"It is not yet time to 'pull in the oars'. This period of life is different from those before, there is no doubt; we even have to somewhat 'invent it ourselves', because our societies are not ready, spiritually and morally, to appreciate the true value of this stage of life."

"Christian spirituality has also been caught somewhat by surprise, with regard to outlining a kind of spirituality of the elderly…The Lord tells us that our history is still open: it is open until the end; it is open with a mission. And he indicates our mission with these three imperatives: 'Rise! Look! Hope!'".

"The prayer of grandparents and of the elderly" would be "a great injection of wisdom for the whole of human society: above all for one which is too busy, too taken, too distracted…the elderly can provide dreams and the young can receive them and carry them forward." Homily, 27.6.17. https://insidethevatican.com/popeswords/wednesday-audience/reflections-family-grandparents-continued-grandparents-words-something-special-young-people/

Pope Francis, *Catechesis on Old Age: 1. The grace of time and the bond between age and life*
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2022/documents/20220223-udienza-generale.html

The Word of God has much to say about this covenant. A short while ago, we heard the prophecy of Joel: "your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions" (2:28). It can be interpreted as follows: when the elderly resist the Spirit, burying their dreams in the past, the young can no longer see the things that must be done to open up the future. When, on the other hand, the old communicate their dreams, the young see clearly what they have to do. Young people who no longer question the dreams of the old, aiming headlong at visions that do not go beyond their noses, will struggle to carry their present and bear their future. If grandparents fall back on their melancholies, young people will look even more to their smartphones. The screen may stay on, but life will die out before its time. Isn't the most serious backlash of the pandemic precisely in the sense of loss of the young? The old have resources of life already lived that they can call upon at any moment. Will they stand by and watch young people lose their vision, or will they accompany them by warming their dreams? Faced with the dreams of the old, what will the young do?

Over a few months, during his General Audience, Pope Francis has presented a series of catecheses on old age. Below are links where these can be read:
Catechesis on Old Age: 1. The grace of time and the bond between age and life (23rd February 2022)
Catechesis on Old Age: 2. Longevity: symbol and opportunity (2nd March 2022)
Catechesis on Old Age: 3. Old Age: A Resource for Light-hearted Youth (16th March 2022)
(Please scroll down through the text for the catechesis.)
Catechesis on Old Age: 4. Farewell and inheritance: memory and testimony (23rd March 2022)
Catechesis on Old Age: 5. Fidelity to God's Visitation for the Next Generation (30th March 2022)
Catechesis on Old Age: 6. 'Honour your father and your mother': love for the gift of life (20th April 2022)
Catechesis on Old Age: 7. Naomi: the alliance between the generations that opens up the future (27th April 2022)
Catechesis on Old Age: 8. Eleazar: consistency of the faith, honourable inheritance (4th May 2022)
Catechesis on Old Age: 9. Judith: Admirable in youth, generous in old age (11th May 2022)
Catechesis on Old Age: 10. Job: The trial of faith, the blessing of waiting (18th May 2022)
Catechesis on Old Age: 11. Ecclesiastes: the uncertain night of meaning and of things in life (25th May 2022)
Catechesis on Old Age: 12. 'Forsake me not when my strength is spent' (Ps 71:9) (1st June 2022)
Catechesis on Old Age: 13. Nicodemus: 'How can a man be born when he is old?' (Jn 3:4) (8th June 2022)
Catechesis on Old Age: 14. The joyful service of faith that is learned in gratitude (cf. Mk 1, 29-31) (15th June 2022)
Catechesis on Old Age: 15. Peter and John (22nd June 2022)

Pope John Paul II *Evangelium vitae* (following on from *Laborem Exercens*) points out how,

"A person who, because of illness, handicap or, more simply, just by existing, compromises the well-being or life-style of those who are more favoured tends to be looked upon as an enemy to be resisted or eliminated. In this way a kind of "conspiracy against life" is unleashed." (EV12) The criterion of personal dignity is replaced by the criterion of efficiency (EV23) leading to a "culture of death . . ." which sees the growing number of elderly and disabled people as intolerable and too burdensome. These people are very often isolated by their families and by society, which are organized almost exclusively on the basis of criteria of productive efficiency, according to which a hopelessly impaired life no longer has any value." (EV64).

Society is in denial:

“While we are young, we are led to ignore old age, as if it were a disease to keep away from; but “In a civilization in which there is no room for the elderly or where they are thrown away because they create problems, this society carries with it the virus of death.” Consequently, “It’s brutal to see how the elderly are thrown away, it is a brutal thing, it is a sin! No one dares to say it openly, but it’s done! There is something vile in this adherence to the throw-away culture.”20 This is contrasted with the tradition of the Church, in which “there is a wealth of wisdom that has always supported a culture of closeness to the elderly, a disposition of warm and supportive companionship in this final phase of life . . . ” https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html