

## **The quality of daily life and respect for the dignity of the human person**

The contribution of volunteering

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A seminar is always a privileged forum, where discussion and debate lead to conclusions that enable us to press ahead with the ideals we are pursuing. In the overall context of the Round Table on "Senior citizens and a commitment to volunteering", we will be discussing in particular "The quality of daily life and respect for the dignity of the human person: The contribution of volunteering".

According to the approach of Community personalism, which characterises the parties and organisations that make up the EPP, of which the Senior Citizens' Union, every individual is a transcendent being and this transcendence implies a spiritual view of life, that prompts us to advance towards full development of our being and our person, and to serve others, whom we see as persons having the same transcendence.

With this in mind, speaking of older persons and their commitment to voluntary work does not simply refer to the personal challenge of those who must reformulate their life in general, their entire life experience in a new situation, with a renewed sense of relations with society. Above all, it refers to solidarity with the community and participation in its life; it means citizenship. Because ageing is being able to attain the peak of initiative, responsibility, spiritual life; it is growing as a person. Growing as a person must be understood as an interactive process between the individual and the society of which he or she is a member, between the person and the community. It is "adding life to the years that have been added to life" as recommended by the United Nations during the International Year of Older Persons.

Mounier said: when I begin taking an interest in the real presence of men, recognising this presence opposite me, understanding the person it reveals, the "you" it proposes, seeing in that person another "me", then I have taken the first step towards community. If approached from this philosophy, volunteering is seen as the result of this discovery of the other, of this communion implied in the ideal community. And insofar as discovery of the other implies an attitude of service to others, which prompts us to participate in the life of the community, is not volunteering in turn a way of developing the concept of citizenship? This full citizenship to which every person is entitled, regardless of age, and which comprises, in addition to rights and responsibilities within the framework of social life, the right to self-determination and personal fulfilment, the right to shape one's own life and to develop one's own capacities and place them at the service of the community.

In today's society, which is more concerned with having than with being, and where social relations are measured in terms of productivity and efficacy, in a society that addresses issues relating to the elderly purely and simply from an economic and budgetary standpoint and which tends to reduce them to the status of passive subjects, is not voluntary work, as an expression of a will to continue developing one's own potential so as to place it at the service of others an asset to be preserved and encouraged if we wish to create a truly new world order? According to Mounier, this order can only be brought into existence through work that refers to something beyond effort and production, and a personal life devoted to a spiritual reality taking us outside ourselves.

Moreover, as the EU is on the verge of adopting the Charter of Fundamental Rights and thus enshrining the concept of European citizenship, does the experience of older persons doing voluntary service, resulting from exercise of the right of citizenship, that is, of the right and duty of participation in community life, take on its full meaning and importance.

Original: Spanish text