

“Letter of Maria”

Community of Sant’Egidio

LET THE ELDERLY STAY HOME. NO TO NURSING HOMES

Hundreds of thousands of signatures have been gathered all over the world to counteract the institutionalization of the elderly and to allow those who are in difficulty to be able to stay at home.

Read the letter and send us your endorsement via email to vivaglianziani@santegidio.org or text/call +1 646 644 3996

I'm almost seventy-five years old, I live alone in my house, the same one where I was with my husband, and my two children before they got married.

I have always been proud of my autonomy, but for a while now I encountered challenges. It is no longer as it was before, and it is hard when I think about my future. I'm still self-sufficient but until when? Sometimes I realize that the gestures of every day, the normal things become a little less casual day by day. Please keep saying: "I wish that I could be like her at her age ...". Going out, shopping and keeping the house: everything is getting more difficult for me.

So I find myself thinking: "What will my future be?". When I was young the answer was simple: it will be with your daughter, with my son-in-law, with the grandchildren. But now how do you do it? The houses are too small and everyone in the family has to work. This is why the simpler answer becomes: the nursing home. It is everywhere, everyone says it, but everyone also knows (but often do not say it) that nobody would like to leave his home to go and live in an institution!

I really can't believe that their bedside table, their space, their rhythm of life there will be better than what you have at home, where every object, every painting, every photograph, remember and fill even a day without much news. I often hear people around saying: "We put him in a beautiful institution, for his own good." Maybe they are sincere, but they don't live there. It is not even a "minor evil", but necessary.

Let's admit we don't happen to be in one of those newscast places, where it's hard for you to give yourself water if you are thirsty, or they mistreat you just because they feel frustrated with the work they do.

But I really don't think that the institution is the answer to those who are a little sick and, above all, are alone. Finding oneself to live suddenly with strangers, unwanted and not chosen: is this truly a way to overcome loneliness? I know what it means to live in an

institution. You want to rest and you cannot do it because you can't stand the noise of others, coughs, and habits of strangers. Yes, they say that when you get old you get exaggerated. But it is not an exaggeration to imagine that if you want to read there are those who want the light off or when you want to watch TV they want another one or it is not the right time.

When you are institutionalized, even the most trivial problems become difficult: having the newspaper every day, repair your glasses immediately when they break, buy the things you need if you can't go out. It often happens that you exchange the linen for another after the laundry and then not you can keep nothing of your own.

What's worse - assuming that eating isn't bad - is that you can't decide anything: when to get up and when to stay in bed, when to turn on and when to turn off the light, when and what to eat. And then, when one is older (and is more embarrassed because he feels less beautiful than once), you are forced to have everything in common: illness, physical weakness, pain, without any intimacy, modesty, and respect.

Someone says about living in a nursing home: "you have everything without weighing on anyone". But it's not true. You don't have it all and it is not the only way not to bother your loved ones. There is an alternative: stay home. With a little assistance, everyone can stay home and, when someone gets sicker, you can have specialized care at home.

This service already exists. Sometimes it more on paper than in reality. Every administration should guarantee assistance. We are many, in fact, that we could stay at home even with just some little help (to manage, to pay bills, to do some cleaning, etc.), or with home healthcare (the physiotherapist, the doctor, the nurse), as required by the law.

It would not cost too much. These services cost three or four times less than one of my hospitalization in a long-term stay or in an institution. Herewith you end up in a nursing home and you didn't decide it yourself. I do not understand why the will of a testament is respected when it comes to DNR and instead, one is not listened to when s/he is alive and does not want to go to a nursing home.

I heard on TV that a lot of resources have been allocated to build new nursing homes. I have a house and a bed already. I have my own "bed". There is no need to create a new one for me. No need for new kitchens to prepare lunch, you can use mine. I don't need you to build me one new big room to watch TV, I already have my television in my room. My bathroom works still fine. If anything, my house needs only a few handrails and a handle on the wall: it will cost little.

What I want for my future is the freedom to be able to choose whether to live the last years of

my life at home or in a nursing home. Today I don't have this freedom. Taking advantage of home care is very difficult, almost impossible: the questions are many and the service is still too limited. But if this assistance at home would develop more and become for all those who need it, you might as well do without building so many new, expensive institutions. And even hospitals would be less crowded.

For this, now that I am not young anymore, I want to make my voice heard and say that I don't want to go in a nursing home and I don't wish that to anyone.

Help me and all the seniors to stay home and die among their belongings possibly with friends and dear ones. Maybe I'll live longer, I will definitely live better.

Maria