



Intergenerational Solidarity, Welfare and Human Ecology



This week we mark our tenth anniversary with our first Plenary Session on intergenerational solidarity. Partly in response to concern about the looming crisis of the welfare state in many places, we asked the speakers and commentators to focus primarily on the challenges posed by the fact that changing relations between generations have placed increasing strain on every society's capacity to provide for the needs of the very young, the frail elderly, and the severely ill or disabled. In so doing, we heeded the Holy Father's reminder [when he first addressed us ten years ago](#) that the very *raison d'être* of social programs 'should be protection of the weakest'.

Our aim this week is to move well beyond standard debates over the 'welfare crisis'. For underlying the welfare crisis is a deeper crisis of meanings and values. Changes in family behavior are fueling, and being fueled by, changes in ideas about dependency, the human person, and family life that have far-reaching implications for the human prospect – for the world's experiments in self-government, for the health of economies, for human rights, and for the future of our social and natural environments. By lifting up the concept of 'solidarity' we seek to challenge solutions based on conflict models that are grounded in flawed concepts of man and society. With our reference to 'ecology' we signal that we will be searching for ways to shift probabilities in favor of keeping the human person at the center of concern. Our hope for this conference is that we will emerge not only with a better understanding of the questions, but with a set of conclusions that will serve as springboards for continued exploration of this subject in future meetings and study groups.

Mary Ann Glendon

