

INFORMATION OFFICE  
OPUS DEI



# INFORMATION HANDBOOK

ON THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE

2021

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## 1. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE

### 1.1. Characteristics and mission

Opus Dei is a pastoral institution of the Catholic Church founded in Madrid on October 2, 1928 by St. Josemaría Escrivá. In 1983 St. John Paul II established Opus Dei as a personal prelature. Its complete name is *Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei*, but it is also called Prelature of Opus Dei or simply Opus Dei, a Latin expression meaning “Work of God”.

The aim of Opus Dei is to contribute to the evangelising mission of the Church, by promoting among Christians of all social classes a life fully consistent with their faith, in the middle of the ordinary circumstances of their lives and especially through the sanctification of their work.

Sanctifying work means working according to the spirit of Jesus Christ, trying to carry it out as well as possible, for the glory of God and the service of others. Work then becomes a place of encounter with God, and an environment for self-improvement and personal growth.

The main activity of Opus Dei is centred around the spiritual formation and pastoral care of its members, so that each one can carry out, in their own place in the Church and in society, a multifaceted apostolic activity, promoting around them the ideal of the universal call to holiness. Faithful of Opus Dei try to find Christian solutions to the problems of society and to give constant witness to their faith.

Opus Dei offers formation and spiritual care not just to its own members but to anyone who wishes to receive it.

### 1.2. Message of Opus Dei

Since its foundation in 1928, Opus Dei has spread the message that all the baptised are called to Christian perfection – to holiness<sup>1</sup> – through the fulfilment of their work and their daily duties. “The spirit of Opus Dei ... leads each person to fulfil the tasks and duties of his own state, of his mission in the Church and in society, with the greatest possible perfection.”<sup>2</sup>

The spread of this message coincides with one of the main purposes of the Second Vatican Council: to remind everyone that “all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity,”<sup>3</sup> ... “in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life ... They are called there by God

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mt 5:48; 1 Thess 4:3; Eph 1:4.

<sup>2</sup> *Conversations with Mgr. Escrivá*, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 40.

so that ... they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of their life.”<sup>4</sup>

**Some of the main features of the message of Opus Dei are the following:**

► **Children of God**

The whole spirit of Opus Dei is based on a fundamental evangelical principle: through baptism, Christians are children of God. That’s why St. Josemaría said that “divine filiation is the foundation of the spirit of Opus Dei.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the formation provided by the prelature seeks to foster confidence in divine providence, simplicity in one’s dialogue with God, a deep awareness of the dignity of each human being and of the need for fraternity among all people, a truly Christian love for the world and for all human realities created by God, and a sense of calm and optimism, together with the joy of letting the Holy Spirit act.

► **Christian meaning of ordinary life**

A Christian is called to seek holiness, that is identification with Jesus Christ, in and through the ordinary circumstances of life. All virtues are important for a Christian: faith, hope and charity, building on the human virtues – generosity, industriousness, justice, loyalty, cheerfulness, sincerity, and so on. In practising these virtues, a Christian comes to reflect, to be configured to, Jesus Christ.

Another consequence of the sanctifying value of ordinary life is that the little things that fill the life of an ordinary Christian take on great importance. “Great holiness consists in carrying out the little duties of each moment.”<sup>6</sup> Examples of such little things include small acts of service, good manners, respect for others, tidiness, punctuality, etc. These little things acquire real importance for the Christian life if they are done for love of God.

► **Sanctifying work, sanctifying through work, sanctifying oneself in work**

“The spirituality of Opus Dei is based on the sanctification of ordinary work.”<sup>7</sup> Sanctifying work means carrying it out for the love of God, which means making an effort to do it to the highest standard possible, that is with professional competence and honesty, and with the desire to serve others. Whoever works in this way improves himself and improves others. Any honest work, from the most important to the humblest in human terms, can be sanctified. Fostering this spirit, the faithful of Opus Dei try to contribute radically to the building up and development of society.

► **Charity and apostolate**

The members of Opus Dei try to bear witness to their Christian faith through their ordinary activities and their dealings with others. Their apostolate is directed to everyone without excluding anyone, and is a consequence of Christ’s call to love God and others. Therefore, their apostolate cannot be separated from the desire to contribute to finding solutions to the material needs and social problems of one’s surroundings.

► **Life of prayer and sacrifice**

Being in constant contact with God and overcoming oneself are necessary elements in the struggle to sanctify ordinary life. Hence the faithful of Opus Dei take on some specific ways of having a relationship with God: mental prayer, daily Mass if possible, sacramental confession, reading and meditating on the Gospel,

<sup>4</sup> Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

<sup>5</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, 64.

<sup>6</sup> *The Way*, 817.

<sup>7</sup> *Conversations with Mgr Escrivá*, 34.

devotion to Our Lady, etc. Another equally important element is sacrifice and penance: giving up small comforts, reducing personal consumption, growing in generosity, etc. Members are encouraged above all to seek mortifications that help them fulfil their duties and make life more pleasant for others.

#### ► Love for freedom

Personal freedom is a gift from God, a “wonderful human gift”<sup>8</sup> inseparably united to an equally personal responsibility and respect for the freedom and convictions of others. Consequently, Opus Dei fosters respect for the legitimate pluralism which exists among Catholics: “pluralism is not simply tolerated. It is desired and loved, and in no way hindered.”<sup>9</sup> The faithful decide for themselves in all professional, family, political, financial or cultural matters with personal freedom and responsibility, without involving the Church or Opus Dei in their choices.

#### ► Unity of life

Friendship with God, ordinary day-to-day life at work or at home, the effort to do apostolate, etc. should all be harmoniously fused into a unity of life. In that way a deep consistency will be achieved between action, desires and aspirations. This interior unity will avoid “a kind of double life. On the one hand, an interior life, a life of union with God; and on the other, a separate and distinct professional, social and family life ... There is just one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is this life which has to become, in both soul and body, holy and filled with God.”<sup>10</sup>

#### ► Family atmosphere

A characteristic of Opus Dei is its Christian family atmosphere. This family tone is present in all activities organised by the Prelature. It also shows through in the family warmth of its centres, the simplicity and trust in personal contacts, and the attitude of service and understanding in daily life.

#### ► Marriage as a Christian vocation

For most ordinary Christians, marriage and family are the setting for their daily sanctification. “For a Christian marriage is not just a social institution, much less a mere remedy for human weakness. It is a real supernatural calling... Husband and wife are called to sanctify their married life and to sanctify themselves in it.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, 184; *Friends of God*, 23.

<sup>9</sup> *Conversations with Mgr. Escrivá*, 67.

<sup>10</sup> *Conversations with Mgr. Escrivá*, 114.

<sup>11</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, 23.

### 1.3. Historical overview

- 1928**      *October 2:* While on a spiritual retreat in Madrid, St. Josemaría Escrivá founds Opus Dei under divine inspiration.
- 1930**      *February 14:* The apostolic work with women begins.
- 1933**      The first apostolic initiative of Opus Dei opens in Madrid: the *DYA Academy*, mainly for students.
- 1934**      DYA becomes a residence for college students. From that base the founder and the first members offer Christian formation, and spread the message of Opus Dei among young people. An important aspect of this work is the teaching of the Catholic faith, and looking after the poor and sick in the outlying neighbourhoods of Madrid.
- 1936**      During the Spanish Civil War, as a consequence of religious persecution, St. Josemaría and other members of Opus Dei are forced to hide in various places of Madrid, and finally flee the city. The circumstances mean a temporary suspension of his plans to expand the apostolic work of Opus Dei to other countries.
- 1939**      Josemaría Escrivá returns to Madrid and restarts the expansion of Opus Dei to other Spanish cities. The start of World War II prevents expansion to other countries.
- 1941**      The bishop of Madrid, Leopoldo Eijo y Garay, grants the first diocesan approval of Opus Dei.
- 1943**      *February 14:* During Mass, God lets St. Josemaría see the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, as a canonical solution to having priests formed in the spirit of Opus Dei.
- 1944**      The bishop of Madrid ordains the first three members of Opus Dei to become priests: Alvaro del Portillo, José María Hernández Garnica, and José Luis Múzquiz.
- 1946**      St. Josemaría moves to Rome. In the years that follow, he travels throughout Europe to prepare the beginnings of Opus Dei in several different countries.
- 1947**      The Holy See grants Opus Dei the first pontifical approval of a universal character.
- 1950**      Pius XII grants the definitive approval to Opus Dei. This approval enables married people to join Opus Dei, and secular clergy to be admitted to the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross.
- 1952**      The *Estudio General de Navarra* begins in Pamplona, Spain. This will become the University of Navarra in 1960.



- 1958** First group of men members of Opus Dei arrive in Kenya in August.
- 1960** First women of Opus Dei arrive in Kenya in June.
- 1961** Strathmore College opens its doors. Kianda Secretarial College begins. Will eventually merge to form Strathmore University in 1993.
- 1961** Kibondeni College of Catering and Hospitality Management begins.
- 1965** Paul VI inaugurates the ELIS Centre, a vocational training centre for young people set up by members and co-operators of Opus Dei in the outskirts of Rome, together with a parish entrusted to Opus Dei in the same neighbourhood.
- 1969** A special general congress of Opus Dei meets in Rome to study the change of Opus Dei's legal status in the Church to that of a personal prelature, a juridical structure introduced by the Second Vatican Council and suited to the pastoral characteristics of Opus Dei.
- 1970-1975** The founder of Opus Dei makes long trips through Latin America, Spain and Portugal, where he addresses large groups of people on topics affecting their Christian life.
- 1975** Josemaría Escrivá dies in Rome on June 26. Some 60,000 people belong to Opus Dei at this point. On September 15 Alvaro del Portillo is elected to succeed the founder.
- 1982** First African priest of Opus Dei ordained.
- 1982-1983** St. John Paul II establishes Opus Dei as a personal prelature, appointing Alvaro del Portillo as its prelate. The formal execution of the pontifical document establishing Opus Dei as a personal prelature takes place on March 19, 1983.
- 1989** Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, prelate of Opus Dei, visits Kenya.
- 1991** St. John Paul II ordains the prelate of Opus Dei, Alvaro del Portillo, as bishop.
- 1992** Beatification of Josemaría Escrivá in Rome by St. John Paul II.
- 1994-1995** Death of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo in Rome on March 23, 1994. On April 20, St. John Paul II appoints Mgr. Javier Echevarría as prelate of Opus Dei, confirming the election carried out by the general elective congress and, on January 6, 1995, he ordains Mgr. Javier Echevarría as bishop.
- 1996** First centres of Opus Dei opened in Kampala, Uganda.
- 1998** Stable apostolic work begins with opening of centres in South Africa.
- 2002** *October 6:* Canonisation of Josemaría Escrivá in St. Peter's Square in Rome.
- 2003** Eastlands College of Technology begins.
- 2014** *September 27:* Beatification of Alvaro del Portillo in Madrid.
- 2016** *December 12.* Death of Bishop Javier Echevarria, second successor of St. Josemaría, in Rome.

- 2017**      *January 23.* Following the third elective congress of the prelature, Pope Francis appoints Mgr. Fernando Ocáriz as prelate of Opus Dei.
- 2019**      *May 18:* Beatification of Guadalupe Ortiz. She is the first lay person and first woman member of Opus Dei to be raised to the altars.



## 1.4. The founder, St. Josemaría Escrivá

Josemaría Escrivá was born in Barbastro, Spain, on January 9, 1902. He had four sisters: Carmen (1899-1957), plus three other younger sisters who died very young; and one brother: Santiago (1919-1994). His parents gave their children a deeply Christian upbringing and education.

In 1915, Josemaría's father's textile business failed, so the family relocated to Logroño, where he found other work. It was in Logroño that Josemaría sensed his vocation for the first time. After seeing some bare footprints left in the snow by a friar who had walked that way a short time earlier, he felt that God wanted something from him, though he did not know exactly what. He thought that he could more easily discover what it was if he became a priest, so he began to prepare for the priesthood, first in Logroño and later in Saragossa. Following his father's advice, he also studied for a law degree at the University of Saragossa. His father died in 1924 and Josemaría was left as head of the family. Ordained on March 28, 1925, he began his ministry in a rural parish, and afterwards in Saragossa.

In 1927, with the permission of his bishop, Fr. Josemaría moved to Madrid to work on his doctorate in law. In that city, on October 2, 1928, God showed him clearly the mission he had been hinting to him for several years; and he founded Opus Dei.<sup>12</sup> From that day on, he worked with all his energies to develop the foundation that God asked of him, while he continued to fulfil the various priestly responsibilities he had at that time. These brought him into daily contact with sickness and poverty in the hospitals and the poor districts of Madrid.

When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, Josemaría was in Madrid. The religious persecution forced him to take refuge in a variety of places. He exercised his priestly ministry in a clandestine fashion until he was finally able to leave Madrid in 1937. After escaping across the Pyrenees to southern France, he took up residence in Burgos.

At the end of the war in 1939 he returned to Madrid. In the years that followed he gave many retreats to lay people, priests, and members of religious orders. In the same year, 1939, he completed his doctorate in law.

In 1946 he took up residence in Rome. There he obtained a doctorate in theology from the Lateran University and was named consultor to two Vatican Congregations, as well as honorary member of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, and honorary prelate. He followed closely the preparations for the Second Vatican Council and its various sessions (1962-1965), keeping in touch with many of the Council Fathers. From Rome he frequently went to different countries in Europe and from 1970 also to countries in Latin America, to spur on the apostolic work of Opus Dei.

<sup>12</sup> cf. Apostolic Constitution *Ut Sit* of John Paul II (November 28, 1982), Introduction.

He died in Rome on June 26, 1975. Thousands of people, including many bishops (a third of all the bishops in the world), requested the Holy See to open his cause of beatification and canonisation.

Pope John Paul II beatified Josemaría Escrivá in 1992. He proclaimed him a saint ten years later, on October 6, 2002. On that occasion he referred to the founder as “the saint of ordinary life.”

## 1.5. Successors of St. Josemaría at the head of Opus Dei

### 1.5.1. Blessed Alvaro del Portillo (1975-1994)



Alvaro del Portillo was born in Madrid on March 11, 1914. He had doctorates in civil engineering, history and canon law.

He was in Opus Dei since 1935. He was a member of the General Council of Opus Dei from 1940 to 1975, serving as secretary general from 1940 to 1947 and from 1956 to 1975. He was ordained to the priesthood on June 25, 1944.

Very soon he became one of the main helpers of the founder and his closest collaborator till the end of his life. He was a consultant to several Congregations and Councils of the Holy See. He took part in the Second Vatican Council, first as head of the ante-preparatory Commission on the Laity and then as secretary to the Commission on the Discipline of the Clergy, and also as a consultant to other commissions. His books *Faithful and Laity in the Church* (1972) and *On Priesthood* (1974) are largely the fruit of that experience. He also helped in the production of the new Code of Canon Law, promulgated by St. John Paul II in 1983.

In 1975 he was elected to succeed Josemaría Escrivá as head of Opus Dei. When Opus Dei was established as a personal prelature in 1982, he was appointed prelate. Pope John Paul II ordained him as bishop on January 6, 1991.

During his nineteen years at the head of Opus Dei, the work of the prelature started in twenty new countries. In 1985 he founded the Roman Academic Centre of the Holy Cross, which would later become the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

He died in Rome on March 23, 1994. Pope John Paul II went to pray before his mortal remains. He was beatified on September 27, 2014 in Madrid, the city where he had been born. “Especially outstanding was his love for the Church,” wrote Pope Francis in a message he sent for the occasion.



### 1.5.2. Bishop Javier Echevarría (1994-2016)

Javier Echevarría was born in Madrid on June 14, 1932. He was the youngest of eight children. He studied first in San Sebastian, in the school run by Marianist priests, and later in Madrid, in a Marists Brothers school.

In 1948 he met some young members of Opus Dei in a students residence. On 8 September of that year, feeling called by God to seek holiness in ordinary life, he asked for admission in Opus Dei. He started his Law degree in the University of Madrid and continued it in Rome. In 1953 he obtained a doctorate in Canon Law at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas, and in 1955 one in Civil Law at the Pontifical Lateran University. On 7 August of that year he was ordained to the priesthood.

He worked closely with St. Josemaría, acting as his personal secretary from 1953 until the latter's death in 1975. When Alvaro del Portillo succeeded St. Josemaría as head of Opus Dei that September, Mgr. Javier Echevarría was appointed secretary general of Opus Dei and, in 1982, vicar general. In 1994, following the death of blessed Alvaro, he was elected prelate of Opus Dei and on January 6, 1995, he was ordained a bishop in St. Peter's basilica by St. John Paul II.

From the start of his ministry as prelate, his priorities were the evangelisation in the fields of the family, young people and culture. He promoted the start of the formative activities of the prelature in 16 countries, such as Russia, Kazakhstan, South Africa, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. He travelled to the five continents to encourage the evangelising work of the faithful of Opus Dei and others who take part in its apostolates. He encouraged the start of many solidarity and healthcare projects, especially for the disadvantaged. He followed with particular interest certain projects set up to help the sick and immigrants.

In his catechetical journeys and pastoral ministry the main themes in his preaching were love for Jesus Christ on the cross, fraternal charity, the importance of grace and the word of God, union with the Pope, family life and service to others. He wrote numerous pastoral letters and several books on the spiritual life, one of which has been translated into English: *Paths to God – Building a Christian Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2001). His other books are in Spanish and include service to the Church (2001), the suffering of Jesus in Gethsemane (2005), the Eucharist and the Christian life (2005), the Mass (2010), and the Creed (2014). His last publication (also in Spanish) is a collection of meditations on the works of mercy (2016).

He was a member of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and of the Apostolic Signatura. He took part in the meetings of the Synod of Bishops held in 2001, 2005 and 2012, as well as those dedicated to America (1997) and Europe (1999).

He died in Rome on December 12, 2016, from respiratory insufficiency.



## 1.6. Mgr. Fernando Ocáriz, prelate of Opus Dei

Mgr. Fernando Ocáriz was born in Paris on October 27, 1944, to a Spanish family exiled in France because of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). He is the youngest of eight children. In 1961 he asked for admission in Opus Dei. He obtained a degree in Physics in 1966 at the University of Barcelona, and a degree in Theology in 1969 at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome. In 1971 he obtained a doctorate in Theology at the University of Navarre.

He was ordained to the priesthood in 1971. In his first few years as a priest he concentrated his ministry on young people and university students. In the 1980s he was one of the professors who started the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, where he was an ordinary professor of Fundamental Theology.

He is a consultor for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1986), for the Congregation for the Clergy (2003), and for the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelisation (2011). In 1989 he entered the Pontifical Theological Academy.

Some of his books have been translated into English: *The Mystery of Jesus Christ, God as Father* and *Love in Action*. He has written extensively on theology and philosophy, both books and articles for specialist magazines. In 2013 a book-length interview with Rafael Serrano was published with the title *God, the Church and the World*.

For 22 years he was a close collaborator of the prelate of Opus Dei, whom he accompanied in his pastoral visits to more than 70 nations. From 1994 to 2014 he was vicar general of the prelature and, from 2014, auxiliary vicar. On January 23, 2017, following the third elective congress of the prelature, Mgr. Fernando Ocáriz was appointed prelate of Opus Dei by Pope Francis.

## 2. THE FAITHFUL OF THE PRELATURE

### 2.1. Priests and laity

The Opus Dei prelature is made up of a prelate, a presbyterate or clergy of its own, and laity, both women and men.

The members of Opus Dei are faithful (*christifideles*) of the prelature. The lay faithful are at the same time faithful of the diocese and the parish where they live. They are ordinary Catholics whose belonging to Opus Dei does not involve a special status or consecration in the Church. They come from all social classes and cultures and are involved in the most varied jobs or professions. Their status in civil society and towards the State is the same as the other citizens with whom they live.

There are not different categories of members or degrees of belonging in Opus Dei. They all are and know themselves to be fully faithful of the prelature. There are only differences in the way of living out that same vocation according to the personal circumstances of each one. These circumstances determine the degree of objective availability for the tasks of the prelature as such and in that sense, there are numeraries, associates and supernumeraries.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of the faithful of Opus Dei (around 70%) are supernumerary members. Generally they are married men or women, for whom the sanctification of their family duties is the most important part of their vocation.

The numeraries and associates commit themselves to celibacy, for apostolic reasons, and so are more easily available for the tasks of formation in the prelature. Celibacy does not change in any way their identity as ordinary faithful, their professional situation or their place in the Church and in society.

The associates of the prelature live with their families, or wherever is convenient according to their personal circumstances. The numeraries ordinarily live in small groups, in centres of Opus Dei. They have their own job and remain available to attend to the apostolic undertakings and the formation of the other faithful of the prelature. Some numerary women, called assistant numeraries, have as their principal task (though not exclusively and not at all times) the domestic responsibilities in the centres of Opus Dei, so that the activities of evangelisation of the prelature are carried out with the spirit of a Christian family. This work constitutes for them their ordinary professional activity.

The priests of the prelature come from the laymen of Opus Dei: numeraries and associates who, after years of belonging to the prelature, having undertaken the studies required for priesthood and discerned that call, are invited by the prelate to receive Holy Orders. Their pastoral ministry is carried out mainly at

<sup>1</sup> St. Josemaría chose expressions from civil life because the ecclesiastical terms that existed at the time were used for consecrated persons and, if they were to be applied to members of Opus Dei, they might make it difficult to understand their secular status. These names continue to be used in academic and diplomatic environments.

the service of the people and apostolic works of the prelature, contributing in this way also to the pastoral work of the local diocese. Their help can also be given directly, for example, through pastoral work in parishes, acting as university or hospital chaplains, or also working in the diocesan offices.

## 2.2. Incorporation into the prelature

Those who ask to join Opus Dei do so moved by a divine calling. Such a calling is a specification or determination of the Christian vocation they received at baptism, and it leads them to seek sanctity and participate in the mission of the Church according to the spirit with which God inspired St. Josemaría.

In order to join Opus Dei a person must freely ask to do so, in the personal conviction of having received this divine vocation; and the request needs to have been accepted by the authorities of the prelature.

The request is made in writing, with a letter, and admission is granted after a minimum of six months. After an additional period of at least one year, the person can be temporarily incorporated into the prelature through a formal declaration. In accordance with canon law, nobody under 18 may be juridically incorporated into Opus Dei. After a minimum of five more years, the incorporation can become definitive.<sup>2</sup>

Incorporation into Opus Dei means, on the part of the prelature, a commitment to provide the person with ongoing formation in the Catholic faith and in the spirit of Opus Dei, as well as the necessary pastoral care from the priests of the prelature. On the part of the person to be incorporated, it means a commitment to remain under the jurisdiction of the prelate in all that concerns the aim of the prelature, and to respect the norms by which it is governed,<sup>3</sup> as well as striving to become holy and to do apostolate according to the spirit of Opus Dei.

This implies, mainly, fostering the spiritual life through prayer, sacrifice and the reception of the sacraments; attending the formation provided by the prelature to acquire a deep and permanent knowledge of the doctrine of the Church and the spirit of Opus Dei; taking part in the evangelising task of the prelature, in the measure of the possibilities of each one, etc.

Departure from the prelature brings about the cessation of mutual rights and duties.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 17-25.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 27.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 33.



## 2.3. Religious and spiritual formation

The prelature provides its faithful with ongoing religious and spiritual formation in a manner compatible with each individual's professional, family and social duties.

The various means of formation are a help to gain a thorough knowledge of Catholic faith and morals, to acquire a deep life of piety, to seek identification with Christ in ordinary life.

These means of formation include weekly classes, called "circles", dealing with doctrinal and ascetical topics. The monthly day of recollection involves setting aside some hours, on one day a month, for personal prayer and reflection on topics to do with Christian life. In addition, once a year, the faithful of the prelature attend a retreat lasting between three and five days, and a theology course lasting between one and three weeks.

Similar activities are also offered to people who take part in the apostolic work of the prelature, and to anyone else who wishes to attend.

This formation is given to men and women separately in the centres of the Opus Dei prelature and in other appropriate places. For example, a talk may be given at the home of one of the people who attend, and a day of recollection may be held in a church whose parish priest permits it to be used for that purpose.

## 2.4. Professional and public activity

Joining the Opus Dei Prelature brings about no change in an individual's personal status. The rights and duties he or she has as a member of civil society and the Church remain the same. "The laity incorporated into the prelature do not change their own personal theological or canonical status, that of ordinary lay faithful, and it is as such that they conduct themselves in all their activities."<sup>5</sup> Their rights and duties in society and in the Church continue to be the same ones as before.

In virtue of the exclusively spiritual nature of its mission, the prelature does not intervene in the temporal questions that confront its lay faithful. Each one acts with complete personal freedom and responsibility.

Opus Dei does not treat the decisions of its members as its own. As far as their professional activity and their social and political doctrines, each member of the prelature, within the limits of Catholic doctrine freely assumed, has the same freedom as any other citizen. The authorities of the prelature must totally avoid even so much as giving advice on these matters.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Congregation for Bishops, Declaration August 23, 1982, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, November 28, 1982, and in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 75, 1983, 464-468.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 88.3.

### 3. PRIESTLY SOCIETY OF THE HOLY CROSS

The Priestly Society of the Holy Cross is an association of clergy intrinsically united to Opus Dei. Its president is the prelate of Opus Dei.<sup>1</sup> The members of this association are the priests and deacons incardinated in the prelature, as well as many other priests and deacons incardinated in dioceses and other ecclesiastical circumscriptions, who join the Priestly Society.

The members who are incardinated in dioceses or other circumscriptions receive spiritual help to seek holiness in the exercise of their ministry, according to the spirit of Opus Dei. Their membership of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross does not involve incorporation into the presbyterate of the prelature. Each one continues to be incardinated in his own diocese and depends solely on his own bishop, to whom alone he gives an account of his pastoral work. Among the members, the following are expressly fostered: love for their diocese and fraternal unity with all the members of the diocesan clergy; obedience to and veneration for their own bishop; piety, the study of the sacred sciences, zeal for souls and a spirit of sacrifice; the effort to promote vocations; and the desire to fulfil as well as possible the ministries entrusted to them by their bishop.<sup>2</sup>

As in the case of lay people incorporated into the prelature, for a priest to be admitted into the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross he needs the inner conviction of having received a call from God to seek sanctity according to the spirit of Opus Dei. The other conditions and timings for their incorporation are similar to those that apply to lay people in the prelature.

The specific means of formation the diocesan priests of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross receive are similar to those offered to the lay faithful of the prelature, such as doctrinal or ascetical classes and monthly days of recollection. In addition, each one makes his own arrangements regarding the common means of formation laid down for priests by canon law, and those his own bishop may arrange or recommend.

The spiritual and formative activities of the members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross do not interfere with the ministry entrusted to them by their bishop. The coordination of these activities is the responsibility of the spiritual director of the Opus Dei prelature, who has no governmental role in the prelature.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 57-78. The Second Vatican Council underlines the importance of the associations for clerics: "One should hold also in high regard and eagerly promote those associations which, having been recognised by competent ecclesiastical authority, encourage priestly holiness in the ministry by the use of an appropriate and duly approved rule of life and by fraternal aid, intending thus to do service to the whole order of priests" (Second Vatican Council, Decree *Presbyterorum ordinis*, no. 8).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 59.1 and 61.

## 4. COOPERATORS OF OPUS DEI

The cooperators of Opus Dei are men and women who, without belonging to Opus Dei, collaborate with its work. They ordinarily help in various educational, charitable and cultural activities in which Opus Dei takes responsibility for the Christian orientation. Their cooperation arises from the conviction that the spirit of Opus Dei and the work of its members helps the building up of a more human society and the spread of the Gospel. No specific vocation is required to be a cooperator.

Cooperators can help in the work of the prelature both spiritually and materially. Those who are believers commit themselves to pray, if possible daily, for Opus Dei and its apostolates. The majority help in the educational and social projects also with financial or material contributions, with their work or their advice.

Cooperators receive the spiritual benefits of the prayer of all the faithful of Opus Dei and the possibility of taking part, if they so wish, in the means of formation. On the other hand, the Holy See has granted some indulgences which Catholic cooperators can obtain on specific days of the year.

Among the cooperators of Opus Dei there are also some who are not Catholic, not Christian and some who are not believers. Some religious communities (which currently number several hundred) who help with their daily prayer for Opus Dei, are collective cooperators of Opus Dei.



 [Look at the brochure online](#)

## 5. APOSTOLIC INITIATIVES

### 5.1. Corporate activities

Each faithful of Opus Dei makes an effort to live an authentic life of faith in his or her place in society. Opus Dei supports them in this endeavour, and its principal activity consists in this.<sup>1</sup>

Besides their personal witness, the faithful of Opus Dei, with the cooperators, and many other people, moved by the Gospel message of helping those in need, can also work together, as when they set up and run educational, charitable and cultural undertakings with the clear aim of rendering a service to society.

These are always civil initiatives, and are financially and professionally managed by those who set them up, with full personal responsibility.

### 5.2. Relationship with Opus Dei

Some of these initiatives entrust their Christian orientation to the Opus Dei prelature, through the appropriate means of doctrinal and spiritual formation, as well pastoral care for those who wish.

There are two types of agreement between these initiatives and the prelature:

a) In the case of those called corporate works of apostolate, Opus Dei morally guarantees the Christian orientation of the activities they provide.

b) In other cases, Opus Dei provides spiritual help to a greater or lesser extent, such as for example providing religion teachers, but without officially giving any moral guarantee as regards the formation offered in those initiatives.

Opus Dei only makes agreements with initiatives of clear public benefit. It does not get involved with business activities, commercial companies, political organisations, etc.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Conversations with Mgr.. Escrivá*, no. 27.

### 5.3. Examples of corporate works around the world

Among the corporate works are secondary schools, universities, centres for the promotion of women, medical clinics in underdeveloped areas, schools for farm workers, institutes for vocational training, student residences and cultural centres. Some examples are:

► **University of Navarre**, founded in Pamplona, Spain, in 1952. It has 13 faculties and offers more than 60 academic degrees. The campus in Pamplona also includes the University Hospital (*Clínica Universidad de Navarra*). The IESE business school, is part of the university and has branches in Barcelona, Madrid, New York and Munich. Examples of other universities of this type are the **Universidad de Piura** (Perú), the **Universidad La Sabana** (Colombia) and the **University of Asia and the Pacific** (Philippines).

► **Monkole**, in Kinshasa (Congo), is a hospital which every year attends to thousands of people in situations of extreme need. Medical assistance is also given at mobile dispensaries at two other locations outside the capital (Eliba and Kimbondo). Attached to Monkole is the Higher Institute of Nursing, which prepares young Congolese women for the nursing profession.

► **Punlaan**, in Manila (Philippines), is a specialist professional school for the catering and tourist industry. Its educational system includes direct contact of the students with hotels and restaurants. Thanks to this, in the last few years, 100% of the young women who have studied at Punlaan have been able to find suitable employment.

► **Midtown Sports and Cultural Center**, in Chicago (USA). Situated in a multiracial neighbourhood where many young people live, Midtown offers programmes providing academic, human, spiritual, and sports training. The programmes help compensate for some of the deficiencies in the local social environment. Of Midtown's students, 95% finish high school, and 60% – a figure well above the average for young people in that area generally – go on to college.

► **Ondare Centre for Professional Formation** in Toshi (to the west of Mexico City) is an educational institute for women in a rural area populated by numerous ethnic groups. Among other activities, it offers administrative training to help women find positions in business and public life in nearby cities.

► **Kianda Foundation** in Nairobi (Kenya) is an educational foundation set up in 1961 for the promotion of social and spiritual welfare of women in that country. Through programmes run by university students they help women living in rural communities to set up and run their own businesses. An example is **Kimlea Girls Technical Training Centre**.

► **The Baytree Centre**, in London (UK). In the 1980s a group of women of different professions started activities in Brixton, a borough with some of London's most deprived housing estates. The Centre aims to create supportive pathways to social inclusion for inner city families through education and training programmes for women and girls. More than 500 women from many different countries and races take part and one of the key activities is to teach them English. 900 children are involved in the Homework Club where they are helped with their studies and education.

► **Kinal, Vocational and Technical Training**. Set up in Guatemala in 1961, it aims to offer young people from low income families the opportunity to study a secondary and technical education to a high academic level. It also offers training courses for adults, mostly for technical jobs. For the last 15 years, 200 students and technicians graduate every year.

► **El Peñón Experimental Agricultural Centre** and **Montefalco School**, in the state of Morelos (Mexico). With their educational work they have contributed since 1953 to raise the cultural and socio-economic level of the peasant population in the Valle de Amilpas.

► **Las Garzas Agricultural School**, in Chile, is a technical college started in 1963 for vocational training in the agricultural area. Thanks to an Alumni Association which provides the necessary funding, the school is free for all pupils.

## 6. ORGANISATION

### 6.1. Personal prelatures

The Second Vatican Council created the juridical structure known as the personal prelature, in the decree *Presbyterorum ordinis*, no. 10, which stated that, among other institutions, “special dioceses or personal prelatures” could be established “to carry out special pastoral tasks in different regions or among any race in any part of the world”. A new juridical figure was described which, being flexible in nature, could contribute to the effective spreading of the Christian message and Christian life.

Personal prelatures are, therefore, institutions belonging to the pastoral and hierarchical structure of the Church.<sup>1</sup> They depend on the Congregation for Bishops and are established by the Pope, having listened to the opinion of the Episcopal Conferences.

At the head of a prelature there is a pastor (the prelate, who may be a bishop), who like diocesan bishops, is appointed by the Pope. Priests and lay people depend on the prelate who exercises over them a certain power of governance or jurisdiction. The power of governance of the prelate is restricted to those aspects which do not interfere with the power of governance of the diocesan bishop.

Most jurisdictions in the Church are territorial, as in the case of a diocese, where the faithful who belong to it are determined according to their territory or domicile. However, jurisdiction is not always linked to territory, but may depend on other criteria, such as employment, religious rite, immigrant status, or an agreement with the jurisdictional body in question. The last-mentioned applies in the case of military ordinariates and personal prelatures.

Because of their structure (equivalent to that of a diocese) and other characteristics, personal prelatures are clearly different both from associations and movements of the faithful, and from religious institutes and the consecrated life.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, canons 294-297, and the constitution *Pastor bonus* of John Paul II (1988), no. 80.

## 6.2. The Opus Dei prelature

Opus Dei was established in 1982 as a personal prelature of international scope. It is governed by the provisions of the general law of the Church, by the apostolic constitution *Ut sit* (of 28 November 1982, formally executed on 19 March 1983) and by its own statutes (*Codex iuris particularis Operis Dei*).<sup>2</sup> This juridical structure corresponds to its nature, as a single organism made up of laity and priests cooperating in a pastoral and apostolic task: striving for and spreading the ideal of holiness in the middle of the world – in daily work and in the ordinary circumstances of life.

The lay faithful of the prelature are, and remain, as any other lay Catholic, faithful of the dioceses in which they live.<sup>3</sup> They depend on the prelate in what refers to the fulfilment of the obligations of a spiritual and apostolic character, which they took on when they made the declaration for their incorporation into the prelature.<sup>4</sup>

Priests who are part of the presbyterate of the prelature depend fully on the prelate.<sup>5</sup> The prelature is responsible for their financial support.

## 6.3. Structure

The prelate is the proper ordinary of the prelature. The style of government in Opus Dei is collegial. The prelate and his vicars always carry out their work assisted by councils, made up largely of laity: the Central Advisory for the women and the General Council for the men. General congresses of the prelature are usually held every eight years. They are attended by members from the countries in which Opus Dei is present. At these congresses the work of the prelature is studied, and the proposed direction of its future pastoral activity is presented to the prelate. When it is necessary to appoint a new prelate, a general elective congress is convened. His election must be confirmed by the Pope,<sup>6</sup> who thereby confers the office of prelate on the person elected.<sup>7</sup>

The prelature of Opus Dei is divided into areas or territories called regions. At the head of each region, whose boundaries usually coincide with those of a particular country, is a Regional Vicar and two councils: a Regional Advisory for women and a Regional Commission for men.

Some of the regions are further subdivided into delegations. Within the limits of its territory, a delegation has a corresponding governmental organisation: a vicar of the delegation and two councils.

Finally, at local level, there are the centres of Opus Dei. These are dedicated to organising the means of formation and pastoral care of the faithful of the prelature in a particular area. Centres may be for women or for men.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Paul VI and his successors decided that a study should be undertaken of the possibility of giving Opus Dei a juridical form suited to its true nature. In the light of the documents of the Council, this form was to be that of a personal prelature. In 1969 work started on this.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 172.2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 27.3 and 125.2.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 125.2.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 130.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 178-179.



## 6.4. Relations with the dioceses

The lay faithful of Opus Dei continue to be faithful of the dioceses in which they reside (as is the case for members of the military ordinariates or other personal circumscriptions) and thus remain under the authority of the diocesan bishop in exactly the same way and regarding the same matters as any other Catholic in the diocese. The jurisdiction of the prelate extends to the obligations contracted by the faithful with the prelate.

The priests of the prelate should foster fraternal relations with the members of the diocesan presbyterate, and observe with all due care the general discipline of the clergy.<sup>8</sup> Diocesan bishops may, with the prior consent of the prelate or his vicar, appoint a priest of the presbyterate of the prelate to a position or office in the diocese (e.g. parish priest or judge). Such a priest will render an account of his work only to the diocesan bishop and will carry it out according to the bishop's directives.

Opus Dei's Statutes (title IV, chapter V) lay down criteria for ensuring a harmonious relationship between the prelate and the dioceses within whose territory the prelate carries out its specific mission. Some characteristics of this relationship are the following:

- a) Opus Dei never begins its apostolic work or establishes any centre of the prelate without the prior consent of the local bishop.
- b) When an existing church or parish is to be entrusted to the prelate, an agreement is drawn up between the diocesan bishop and the prelate or the relevant regional vicar. The general regulations of the diocese governing churches in the care of secular clergy will be observed in such cases.<sup>9</sup>
- c) The regional authorities of the prelate regularly inform and keep in touch with the bishops of dioceses in which the prelate carries out its pastoral and apostolic work, and also with the bishops holding offices within the Episcopal Conferences and related agencies.<sup>10</sup>

The apostolic work of the members of Opus Dei, like that of many other Catholics, seeks to bring about Christian renewal, the benefits of which will, with the grace of God, be experienced by parishes and local churches throughout the world. These include conversions, a greater participation in the Eucharist, more assiduous reception of the other sacraments, the spreading of the Gospel message to many who are distant from the faith, initiatives on behalf of those in need, helping out with catechism courses and other parish activities, and cooperation with diocesan bodies.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. *Statutes*, 41 and 56.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 180.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 174.2.

<sup>11</sup> As John Paul II has stated "The fact that the lay faithful belong both to their own particular Church and to the prelate, in which they are incorporated, means that the mission proper to the prelate flows together with the evangelising effort made by each particular Church, as the Second Vatican Council foresaw when it desired the figure of personal prelatures." (John Paul II, Address 17/3/2001, no.1, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 18/3/2001, p.6)

## 6.5. Financial matters

The faithful of the prelature are responsible for providing for their own personal and family needs by means of their ordinary work.<sup>12</sup> Together with the cooperators, they also take on responsibility for the costs incurred in carrying out the pastoral work of the prelature. These costs are essentially those relating to the support and formation of the priests of the prelature; those of the curia of the prelature, the regional vicar and the central offices in each region or delegation; the alms which the prelature provides, and the contributions sent, in case of need, to the parents of numeraries and associates.

In addition, the faithful of Opus Dei, with the assistance of the cooperators and many others, develop social initiatives, on a non-profit making basis, for the good of many souls. These include charitable and educational activities where the spiritual and doctrinal orientation is entrusted to the prelature. Each undertaking is financed in the same way as any other similar institution: e.g. by residential fees, grants, donations, etc.

Obviously, the faithful of Opus Dei, as all other Catholics, also contribute to their parishes, or to whatever diocesan or religious initiatives they want.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 94.2.

## 7. OPUS DEI IN SOUTH AFRICA

During the Second Vatican Council, Cardinal Owen McCann, then Archbishop of Cape Town, the first metropolitan see in SA, wrote to St Josemaría, the Founder of Opus Dei, requesting that Opus Dei begin its activities here. However, at that time it was not possible to accede to this request because of the Founder's insistence that Opus Dei works with all races. St Josemaría prayed for the beginnings of Opus Dei in SA from that time up until his death.

With the transition to a democratic era after the first post-apartheid elections in South Africa on 27 April 1994, many people from various African countries and other parts of the world flocked to South Africa. This was partly a result of the opening of the country to the outside world as well as the new opportunities presented by its reintegration into the international community.

Some faithful of Opus Dei were among those who came to South Africa during this period: as diplomats, university lecturers, businessmen, etc. This gave rise to regular trips of other faithful of Opus Dei first from Kenya and later on from Nigeria, to provide means of Christian formation for the faithful of the prelature and their friends. The possibility of beginning the work of Opus Dei in a stable way was then studied.

The opening of the first centre of Opus Dei for men took place in December 1998. In December 1999 the first centre for women started some activities. Years later a residence for male students opened its doors in Johannesburg. In Pretoria, there are now also two residences for students, one for men and another for women. Weekend retreats and longer seminars and courses are held in Ducks Dam Hall, a venue located in a rural area near Pretoria, on the way to Hartebeespoort. There are also regular trips to Cape Town to run some activities of Christian formation. In addition to these initiatives, some Opus Dei members, working with other citizens through Komati Foundation, have established social welfare programmes to assist the underprivileged, particularly in the fields of education and sports.

Although the main service that the priests of Opus Dei render to the Church is their pastoral work in the activities organised by the Prelature, some of them also work in activities entrusted to them by diocesan bishops. Thus in 2005, His Grace Buti Joseph Tlhagale, Archbishop of Johannesburg, entrusted the parish church of Mater Dolorosa (Our Lady of Sorrows) to the Prelature of Opus Dei.

In 2003 and 2013, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, paid a visit to South Africa. On both occasions, he met the faithful of Opus Dei, their families and many cooperators and friends of the Prelature, in small groups and also in bigger gatherings. He paid visits to the Archbishops of Johannesburg and Pretoria as well as to the Papal Nuncio. In April 2021, the Prelate of Opus Dei merged the regions of East and Southern Africa, and appointed Fr. Silvano Ochudho Regional Vicar of Opus Dei to the new region. He works from the regional headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.



## 8. SOME DATA

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### 8.1. People

The prelature is made up of around 93,000 people, of whom about 2,095 are priests.

Of the total, approximately 57% are women and 43% men. The distribution by continent is as follows: Africa 4%, America 34%, Asia 4%, Europe 57%, Oceania 1%.

Apart from the priests of the prelature, some 1,900 priests, and also some deacons, incardinated in different dioceses throughout the world belong to the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross.

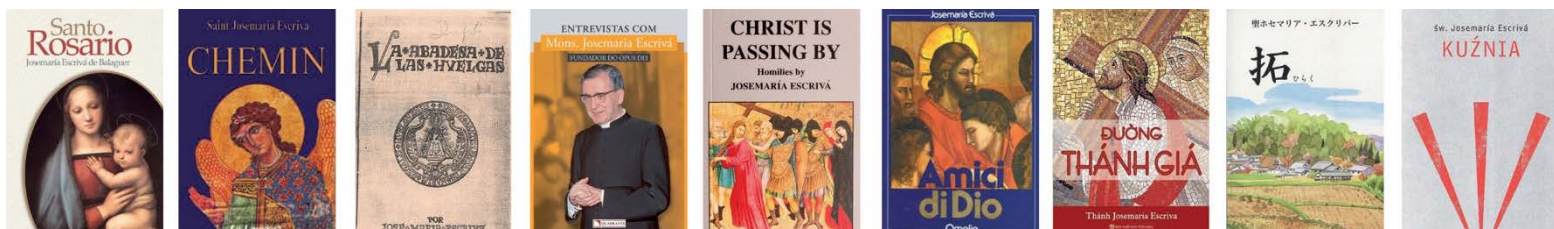
## 8.2. Dates when Opus Dei began its work in different countries



**1945** Portugal  
**1946** Italy and Great Britain  
**1947** France and Ireland  
**1949** Mexico and United States  
**1950** Chile and Argentina  
**1951** Colombia and Venezuela  
**1952** Germany  
**1953** Guatemala and Peru  
**1954** Ecuador  
**1956** Uruguay and Switzerland  
**1957** Brazil, Austria and Canada  
**1958** Japan, Kenya and El Salvador  
**1959** Costa Rica  
**1960** Holland  
**1962** Paraguay  
**1963** Australia  
**1964** Philippines  
**1965** Belgium and Nigeria  
**1969** Puerto Rico  
**1978** Bolivia  
**1980** Congo, Ivory Coast and Honduras

**1981** Hong Kong  
**1982** Singapore, Trinidad & Tobago  
**1984** Sweden  
**1985** Taiwan  
**1987** Finland  
**1988** Cameroon and Dominican Republic  
**1989** Macao, New Zealand and Poland  
**1990** Hungary and Czech Republic  
**1992** Nicaragua  
**1993** India and Israel  
**1994** Lithuania  
**1996** Estonia, Slovakia, Lebanon, Panama, Uganda  
**1997** Kazakhstan  
**1998** South Africa  
**2003** Slovenia and Croatia  
**2004** Latvia  
**2007** Russia  
**2008** Indonesia  
**2009** South Korea and Romania  
**2011** Sri Lanka

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- ▶ There are now **critical-historical editions** in Spanish, and some in English, of the writings of St. Josemaría for: *Camino* (2002), *Santo Rosario* (2010), *Conversaciones con Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer* (2012), *Es Cristo que pasa* (2013) and *La Abadesa de las Huelgas* (2016).

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