

What is Opus Dei?

Opus Dei is part of the Catholic Church. The name is Latin for “Work of God”.

Opus Dei’s mission is to spread the Christian message that every single person is called to holiness. This teaching was at the heart of the Second Vatican Council, which was enormously influential in shaping the Catholic Church’s understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ in the modern world. Holiness, in fact, means following Jesus Christ, imitating Him in thoughts, feelings, words and deeds. It means loving God and neighbour, with a love that gives rise to other virtues, such as humility, justice, integrity, and solidarity. Holiness is attained only with God’s assistance and our constant striving, but Opus Dei offers support and guidance to help all those who want (whether or not they are members) to aim at such holiness in their ordinary lives, especially through their everyday work.

Opus Dei teaches that any work, if carried out in the spirit of Jesus Christ, competently and honestly, with the aim of loving God and serving others, can be “sanctified”: what matters is the love that is put into work, not its human importance. The work of a hairdresser or a banker can be as holy as that of a priest.

Members

People of all kinds belong to Opus Dei: priests and lay people, men and women, young and old, married and single, of every occupation and social level. Men and women have the same status in Opus Dei. Most members are married and have families – these are called supernumeraries. Some members (numeraries and associates) make a commitment to celibacy, and so generally have more time and availability to dedicate to the various activities promoted by Opus Dei.

Some male celibate members are ordained as priests, who make up roughly 2% of the membership. There are currently about 85,000 members of Opus Dei worldwide, of whom around 500 are in Britain.

Commitments

To help them in their quest for holiness, members of Opus Dei receive training, support and guidance (“spiritual formation”), including philosophy and Catholic theology. Activities of spiritual formation for individuals or groups are held separately for women and men.

All members attend weekly and monthly meetings, a yearly retreat, and a formation course lasting between one and three weeks, depending on personal availability.

Spiritual commitments include daily Mass, the reading of Sacred Scripture and other spiritual books, the Rosary, and a time spent each day in personal prayer.

Members also try to incorporate an element of sacrifice into their lives. Although traditional Catholic practices of penance are not discouraged, Opus Dei places more emphasis on the sacrifices involved in daily life: carrying out one’s duties conscientiously, putting others’ needs before one’s own, finding a smile in annoying circumstances, and so on.

Members are aware of their duty to bear witness to their Christian faith wherever they are. Like the first Christians, they strive to change the world for the better, and find fulfilment in taking seriously the Christian duty to help those in need.

Joining Opus Dei

People join Opus Dei because they feel they have a vocation: a personal, intimate call from God to place their whole life at his service in the middle of the world. Although there are practical differences in the way they live it out, the vocation of supernumeraries, associates and numeraries is one and the same: to seek holiness in their ordinary lives.

Any lay Catholic may ask to join Opus Dei. People who think they may have such a vocation are advised to attend activities of spiritual formation and take on the commitments of members for some time to discern whether it really is God’s will for them. When they have matured in their decision, after a suitable time, they may ask for admission.

After a further eighteen months, if it is still their firm belief that God is calling them, they may make a commitment to Opus Dei. The minimum age for making this commitment is 18. It needs to be renewed each year for at least five years before a lifelong commitment is possible.

People join Opus Dei by choice, and they remain equally free to leave.

Ordinary people

There is no outward change in the lives of those who join Opus Dei. They work in the same jobs and live in the same social settings, but now they see their work and relationships as opportunities for coming closer to God.

Opus Dei does not publish members’ names but leaves it to them to tell people themselves, respecting their freedom. While members do not ordinarily announce their membership to the general public, neither do they conceal it. Friends, relatives and acquaintances will naturally know of it. Indeed, it would be impossible for Opus Dei to carry out its mission if members were not open about their involvement.

Opus Dei has no views of its own on politics, economics, or

social matters. Members are totally free in their professional lives and political opinions, and are personally responsible for their actions.

Corporate activities

As an expression of their personal desire to serve society, members of Opus Dei, together with others (Catholics, non-Catholics, non-Christians, and even some of no faith at all) have set up many educational, charitable and cultural ventures around the world. Examples include halls of residence for students, youth clubs, inner-city achievement programmes, hospitals, schools and universities. Such activities are always open to people of all creeds, races and social conditions.

In Britain, they include Netherhall House and Ashwell House, halls of residence in London for male and female students respectively, and Wickenden Manor, a retreat centre in Sussex.

Opus Dei does not own any of these undertakings, but takes responsibility only for providing spiritual formation and pastoral care of the people who work in them. Ownership remains with the people who set them up and run them. Funding comes from whatever fees they may charge, as well as donations from members of Opus Dei, supporters and friends. Financial accounts for such institutions are publicly audited and are available for inspection.

The Prelature

Opus Dei was established as a personal prelate in 1982 by Pope John Paul II. The personal prelate is a new type of organisation in the Catholic Church, created in the 1960s by the Second Vatican Council. As part of the Catholic Church, Opus Dei works closely with the local Catholic bishop, whose consent is required before an Opus Dei centre can be set up in his diocese, and who is regularly informed of Opus Dei’s activities there.

The personal prelate provides a suitable framework for an organisation consisting of ordinary lay Catholics who simply wish to serve God by doing their ordinary things as well as possible.

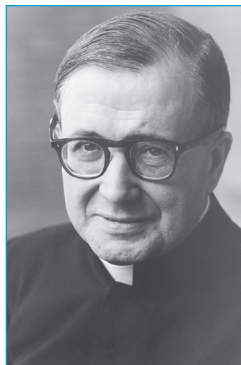
Opus Dei’s central organisation is based in Rome and is headed by a Prelate, currently Bishop Javier Echevarría, who was appointed in 1994.

“Members are totally free in their professional lives and political opinions and are responsible for their actions”

“Opus Dei offers support and guidance to help all those who want (whether or not they are members) to aim at holiness”

The founder

Saint Josemaría Escrivá (1902-1975), founded Opus Dei in 1928. Even during his lifetime he had a reputation for holiness, which continued to grow around the world after his death. Many people have testified to having received spiritual and material favours, including medically inexplicable cures, through his intercession. He was declared a saint by Pope John Paul II in 2002. The feast day of Saint Josemaría is June 26.



WRITINGS BY SAINT JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ

- **The Way.** Brief, incisive points for reflection and prayer.
- **Holy Rosary.** Brief meditations on the mysteries of the Rosary.
- **Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá.** Newspaper and magazine interviews with Saint Josemaría.
- **Christ Is Passing By.** Homilies for the principal feasts of the liturgical year.
- **Friends of God.** Homilies on key Christian virtues.
- **The Way of the Cross.** Reflections on the Stations of the Cross.
- **Furrow.** A posthumous collection of points for prayer and reflection which focus on human virtues.
- **The Forge.** Another posthumous collection of points for prayer and reading.
- **In Love with the Church.** Homilies on the Church.

BIOGRAPHIES OF SAINT JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ

- *Berglar, Peter, Opus Dei – Life and Work of Its Founder Josemaría Escrivá*, Scepter, Princeton, 1994.
- *Cavalleri, Cesare, Immersed in God – Josemaría Escrivá as seen by his successor, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo*, Scepter, Princeton, and Sinag-Tala, Manila, 1996.
- *Coverdale, John, Uncommon Faith – The Early Years of Opus Dei (1928-1943)*, Scepter, New York, 2002
- *Gondrand, François, At God's Pace*, Scepter, London and New York, 1989.
- *Keenan, William, The Day the Bells Rang Out*, Gracewing, Leominster, 2004
- *Scott, Helena and Tolansky, Ethel, Josemaría Escrivá*, CTS, London, 2001.
- *Vázquez de Prada, Andrés, The Founder of Opus Dei*, 3 Volumes, Scepter, New York, 2001-2005.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS ON OPUS DEI

- *Bristow, Peter, Opus Dei – Christians in the midst of the world*, CTS, London, 2001.
- *Fuenmayor, Amadeo et al., The Canonical Path of Opus Dei*, Scepter-MTF, Princeton-Chicago, 1994.
- *Illanes, J. L., On the Theology of Work: Aspects of the Teaching of the Founder of Opus Dei*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1982.
- *Le Tourneau, Dominique, What is Opus Dei?*, Gracewing, Leominster, 2002.
- *Messori, Vittorio, Opus Dei, Leadership and Vision in Today's Catholic Church*, Regnery, Washington, DC, 1997.
- *Rodriguez, Pedro et al., Opus Dei in the Church*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1995.
- *Romano, Guiseppe, Opus Dei, Who? How? Why?* Alba House, New York, 1995.
- *West, William J., Opus Dei, Exploding a Myth*, Little Hills Press, Sydney, 1987.

All the books listed above are available from:
Scepter UK Ltd, 231 Nithsdale Road, Glasgow G41 5HA.
Tel: (0141) 427 3236 Fax: (0141) 427 7547
scepter@pobox.com

Seeking holiness
in everyday life

some information
on Opus Dei

Further information

On Opus Dei: www.opusdei.org.uk

On Saint Josemaría: www.josemariaescriva.info

On the writings of Saint Josemaría: www.escrivaworks.org

On the bulletin of the prelature: www.romana.org

For further information about Opus Dei or activities near you, contact:

Information Office

Prelature of Opus Dei in Britain

6 Orme Court, London W2 4RL

Tel: 020-7221 9176 Fax: 020-7243 9400

E-mail: info@opusdei.org.uk

“There is something holy, something
divine, hidden in the most ordinary
situations, and it is up to each one of you
to discover it”

Saint Josemaría Escrivá