

BEAT MULLER – NOVEMBER 2011

INFORMATION HANDBOOK  
ON THE  
OPUS DEI PRELATURE

Information Office of the Opus Dei Prelature in Britain

[www.opusdei.org.uk](http://www.opusdei.org.uk)

The Information Handbook is a publication of the Information Office of Opus Dei and is published to help journalists and other media professionals. It contains a summary of the nature, history and organisation of the Opus Dei Prelature, an institution of the Roman Catholic Church.

For further information on the internet:

[www.opusdei.org.uk](http://www.opusdei.org.uk) is the web page of Opus Dei, with up to date information and a news section. It is available in 30 different languages.

[www.josemariaescriva.info](http://www.josemariaescriva.info) contains information about the founder of Opus Dei including: biography, DVD clips of St Josemaría speaking to various audiences, timeline, devotion to him in different parts of the world, letters received from people who attribute favours received to his intercession or who thank him for having brought them close to the Christian faith; initiatives inspired by his preaching, etc.

[www.romana.org](http://www.romana.org) Romana is the official bulletin of the Opus Dei Prelature. It is published twice a year and is available in Italian, English and Spanish. Distribution is by subscription. The website contains the electronic version of the bulletin plus the facility to subscribe to the paper version.

[www.escrivaworks.org](http://www.escrivaworks.org) contains a searchable database of all the published works of St Josemaría Escrivá (The Way, Furrow, The Forge, Friends of God, Christ is Passing By, etc). The website also allows the visitor to open a personal folder where they can store the texts they wish.

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# 1

## **GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE**

### **1.1 CHARACTERISTICS AND MISSION**

Opus Dei is a personal prelature of the Catholic Church. It was founded in Madrid on 2 October 1928, by Josemaría Escrivá. Its headquarters are in Rome.

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. This apostolic work is not limited to specific fields, but tries to help to find Christian solutions to the problems of society and to give constant witness to the faith.

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### 1.2 MESSAGE OF OPUS DEI

Since its foundation in 1928, Opus Dei has spread the message that all the baptised are called to holiness, through the fulfilment of their work and their daily duties.

“An essential characteristic of the spirit of Opus Dei is that it does not take anyone out of his place. Rather it 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>1</sup> Opus Dei serves the Church and society by fostering holiness and personal apostolic commitment among the Christian faithful, helping them to discover and take on the demands of their personal vocation in the specific place they occupy in the world.

The faithful of Opus Dei are ordinary citizens in no way different from their fellow citizens; they seek to get on with everyone and learn from them.

The following are some of the main features of the spirit of Opus Dei:

**Children of God.** “Divine filiation is the foundation of the spirit of Opus Dei”<sup>2</sup> said St Josemaría. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> *Conversations with Mgr. Escrivá*, 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, 64.

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**Love for freedom.** The members of Opus Dei are citizens who enjoy the same rights and are subject to the same obligations as any other citizen. In their professional, family, political, financial or cultural activities, they act with freedom and personal responsibility, not involving the Church or Opus Dei in their decisions, nor presenting those decisions as the best or the most consistent with the Catholic faith. This implies respecting the freedom and the opinions of others. The formation offered by the prelature fosters respect for the legitimate pluralism which exists among Catholics in matters of opinion.

**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>3</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 oneself in work, sanctifying others through work.** Sanctifying work means carrying it out with the greatest possible human perfection (with professional honesty and

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<sup>3</sup> *The Way*, 817.

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competence) and Christian perfection (for love of God and as a service to humanity).

Any honest job, from the most important to the humblest in human terms, can be an occasion for giving glory to God and for serving others.

**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 every one without excluding anyone, and is done, first, by personal example, and then by word. The wish to make Christ known to others, which is a direct consequence of charity (that is, the love of God above all things and of one's neighbour as oneself), 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.** The spirit of Opus Dei encourages a life of prayer and sacrifice. To achieve this, people are advised to develop Christian habitual devotions such as prayer, daily Mass, sacramental confession, reading and meditating on the Gospel, devotion to Our Lady, etc. They are also encouraged to acquire a spirit of sacrifice and penance, especially in all those things that help them fulfil their duties and to make life more pleasant for others, as well as sometimes renouncing small pleasures, fasting, almsgiving, etc.

**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 acts, 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



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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>4</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.

### 1.3 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

**1928.** While on a spiritual retreat in Madrid, on 2 October, Josemaría Escrivá founds Opus Dei under divine inspiration.

**1930. 14 February:** The apostolic work with women begins.

**1933.** The first centre of Opus Dei opens in Madrid: the *DYA Academy*, mainly for students, where classes in law and architecture are given.

**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 to children, and looking after the poor and sick in the outlying neighbourhoods of Madrid. Josemaría Escrivá makes his activity known at all times to the bishop of Madrid, who from the very beginning grants his approval and blessing.

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<sup>4</sup> *Conversations with Mgr. Escrivá*, 114.

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**1936.** During the Spanish Civil War Josemaría Escrivá is forced to hide in various different places of Madrid, as a consequence of religious persecution. 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. 14 February:** During Mass, God lets Fr Josemaría see the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, as a means to enable priests to be ordained for Opus Dei.

**1944.** The bishop of Madrid ordains the first three faithful of Opus Dei to become priests: Álvaro 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 the first pontifical approval.

**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 University of Navarre begins in Pamplona, Spain.

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**1957.** The Holy See entrusts the prelate of Yauyos, a mountainous region of Peru, to Opus Dei.

**1965.** Paul VI inaugurates the ELIS Centre, a vocational training centre for young people located in the outskirts of Rome, together with a parish entrusted to Opus Dei by the Holy See.

**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 prelate, a juridical structure introduced by the Second Vatican Council and suited to the pastoral characteristics of Opus Dei.

**1970-75.** 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 26 June. Some 60,000 people belong to Opus Dei at this point. On 15 September Álvaro del Portillo is elected to succeed the founder of Opus Dei.

**1982.** John Paul II establishes Opus Dei as a personal prelate, appointing Mgr. Álvaro del Portillo as its prelate. The formal execution of the pontifical document establishing Opus Dei as a personal prelate takes place on 19 March 1983.

**1991.** John Paul II ordains the Prelate of Opus Dei, Mgr. Álvaro del Portillo as bishop.

**1992.** Beatification of Josemaría Escrivá in Rome by John Paul II.

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**1994.** Death of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo in Rome. John Paul II appoints Mgr. Javier Echevarría as prelate of Opus Dei, confirming the election carried out by the general elective congress.

**1995.** John Paul II ordains Mgr Javier Echevarría as bishop.

**2002. 6 October:** Canonisation of Josemaría Escrivá in St Peter's Square in Rome.

### **1.4 THE FOUNDER, SAINT JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ**

Josemaría Escrivá was born in Barbastro, Spain, on 9 January 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 Zaragoza. Following his father's advice, he also studied for a law degree at the University of Zaragoza. His father died in 1924 and Josemaría was left as head of the family. Ordained on 28 March 1925, he began his ministry in a rural parish, and afterwards in Zaragoza.

In 1927, with the permission of his bishop, Fr. Josemaría moved to Madrid to work on his doctorate in law. There, on 2 October 1928,

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God showed him clearly the mission he had been hinting to him for several years; and he founded Opus Dei. 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. 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, including Britain and Ireland, to spur on the apostolic work of Opus Dei.

He died in Rome on 26 June 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.

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Pope John Paul II beatified Josemaría Escrivá in 1992. He proclaimed him a saint ten years later, on 6 October 2002, in St Peter's Square, in Rome.

Further information:

- **CASCIARO, Pedro**, *Dream and your dreams will fall short*, London 1988.
- **COVERDALE, John F.**, *Uncommon Faith*, New York 2002.
- **KEENAN, William**, *St Josemaría Escrivá and the origins of Opus Dei*, Vol 1: *The Day the Bells Rang Out* (2004), Vol 2: *The Path Through the Mountains* (2011).
- **PORTILLO, Álvaro del**, *Immersed in God*, Princeton, 1996.
- **URBANO, Pilar**, *The Man of Villa Tevere*, Princeton, 2011.
- **VAZQUEZ DE PRADA, Andrés**, *The Founder of Opus Dei. Vols. I, II and III*, Princeton 2001-2005.
- [www.josemariaescriva.info](http://www.josemariaescriva.info)

### 1.5 BISHOP ÁLVARO DEL PORTILLO, FIRST SUCCESSOR

Álvaro del Portillo was born in Madrid on 11 March 1914. He became a member of Opus Dei in 1935 and was ordained to the priesthood on 25 June 1944. 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 had doctorates in civil engineering, history and canon law.

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* (1969) and *About Being a Priest* (1970) are largely the fruit of that experience.

In 1975 he was elected to succeed Mgr Escrivá as head of Opus Dei. When Opus Dei was established as a personal prelate in 1982, he

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was appointed prelate. Pope John Paul II ordained him as bishop on 6 January 1991.

In 1985 he founded the Roman Academic Centre of the Holy Cross, which would later become the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

During his nineteen years at the head of Opus Dei, the work of the prelate started in twenty new countries.

Bishop Álvaro del Portillo died in Rome on 23 March 1994. That same day, Pope John Paul II came to the headquarters of Opus Dei to pray before his mortal remains. The Congregation for the Causes of the Saints approved that for the investigation on his life, virtues and reputation for sanctity, two tribunals be set up: one in the Vicariate of Rome, and the other in the Prelature of Opus Dei. Both started work in March 2004 and finished in 2008.

Further information:

- **BERNAL, Salvador**, *Alvaro del Portillo*, New York 1999.

Books by Bishop Alvaro del Portillo

- **PORTILLO, Álvaro del**, *Immersed in God*, Princeton, 1996.
- **PORTILLO, Álvaro del**, *Faithful and laity*, Dublin 1972.

### 1.6 BISHOP JAVIER ECHEVARRÍA

The present prelate of Opus Dei was born in Madrid on 14 June 1932.

He holds doctorates in both civil and canon law. Ordained a priest on 7 August 1955, he worked closely with St Josemaría, acting as his personal secretary from 1953 until the latter's death in 1975. From 1966 he formed part of the General Council of Opus Dei.

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In 1975, when Álvaro del Portillo succeeded St Josemaría as head of Opus Dei, Fr Echevarría was named secretary general, a position hitherto occupied by Álvaro del Portillo. In 1982, when Opus Dei was established as a personal prelature, he became its vicar general.

After the death of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, John Paul II appointed him prelate of Opus Dei on 20 April 1994. The Pope ordained him as bishop on 6 January 1995, in St. Peter's Basilica.

Books by Bishop Javier Echevarria

- **ECHAVARRIA, Javier**, *Paths to God – building a Christian life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, New York 2010.



# 2

## THE FAITHFUL OF THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE

### 2.1 PRIESTS AND LAITY

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

There are not different categories of members in Opus Dei. There is one single vocation, which is the same for all the faithful of the prelate. Through it they are, and consider themselves to be, all equally members of a single portion of the People of God. There are simply different ways of living that same Christian vocation, according to the different circumstances of each one.

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 Christian life.

The rest of the faithful of the prelate are men and women who commit themselves to celibacy, for apostolic reasons. Some live with their families, or wherever is convenient for professional reasons. These are the associates of the prelate. For other members, circumstances allow them to be totally available to attend to the apostolic undertakings and the formation of the other faithful of the prelate. These are the numeraries, and they are usually able to live in centres of Opus Dei. Amongst the apostolates carried out by the women numeraries, some women numeraries and assistant numeraries have as their principal task that of the

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domestic responsibilities in the centres of the prelature. 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 and having undertaken the studies required for priesthood, are invited by the prelate to receive Holy Orders. Their pastoral ministry is carried out mainly at the service of the people and apostolic works of the prelature. This ministry is a service to the local diocese, and can also take place, for example, by hearing confessions 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 written in a family style, 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 of a

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contractual nature, which is renewable annually. After a minimum of five more years, the incorporation can become definitive.<sup>5</sup>

In accordance with canon law, no one under 18 may be juridically incorporated into the prelate.

Incorporation into Opus Dei means, on the part of the prelate, 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 prelate. 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 prelate, and to respect the norms by which it is governed,<sup>6</sup> as well as striving to become holy and to do apostolate according to the spirit of Opus Dei.

Departure from the prelate brings about the cessation of mutual rights and duties.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.3 RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

The prelate 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 offered by the prelate enable its members to acquire a deep life of piety, to seek identification with Christ, and to gain a thorough knowledge of Catholic faith and morals.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 17-25.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 33.

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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.

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 circle 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>8</sup>

In virtue of the exclusively spiritual nature of its mission, the prelature does not intervene in the temporal questions that

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<sup>8</sup> Congregation for Bishops, Declaration 23 August 1982, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, 28 November 1982, and in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 75, 1983, 464-468.

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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. The Statutes lay down that in matters pertaining to professional, social and political activity, each of the faithful of the prelature, within the limits of Catholic doctrine on faith and morals, has the same full freedom as other Catholic citizens. The authorities of the prelature must totally avoid even so much as giving advice on these matters.<sup>9</sup>

Further information:

- **RODRIGUEZ, Pedro; OCARIZ, Fernando; ILLANES, José Luis**, *Opus Dei in the Church*, Princeton, 1994.

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<sup>9</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.<sup>10</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 different dioceses. The prelate of Opus Dei is also president of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross.

The diocesan clergy who belong to the Priestly Society seek exclusively spiritual help and strive for 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.

As in the case of lay people incorporated into the Opus Dei 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. Among the members, the following are expressly fostered: love for their diocese and 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

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 57-78.

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effort to promote vocations; and the desire to fulfil his priestly ministry with the greatest possible perfection.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, the spiritual help offered by the Priestly Society to those priests seeks to foster their faithfulness in the fulfilment of their priestly duties, as well as encouraging the union of each one with his own bishop and fraternity with other priests. The Church has recommended this type of priestly association in a number of different documents, including several texts of the Second Vatican Council,<sup>12</sup> and the Code of Canon Law.<sup>13</sup>

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 prelatore, 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.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 59.1 and 61.

<sup>12</sup> “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>13</sup> Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 278.

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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 prelate, who has no governmental role in the prelate.



# 4

## COOPERATORS OF OPUS DEI

The cooperators of Opus Dei are men and women who, without belonging to Opus Dei, collaborate with the faithful of the prelate in various educational, charitable and cultural activities.

The main contribution of the cooperators towards these ventures is that of their prayer, but they can also help through their work or financially. They receive the spiritual benefits the Church grants to those who collaborate with Opus Dei: indulgences which the cooperators, provided they observe the conditions established by the Church, can gain on specific days of the year. From Opus Dei they also receive the spiritual help of the prayers of all its members, and the possibility of taking part, if they so wish, in the means of formation such as talks, retreats and circles.

No specific vocation is required to be a cooperator. Generally cooperators come from among the work colleagues, relatives and friends of the members of Opus Dei, or from among those who have devotion to St Josemaría, those who take part in the apostolates of the prelate, or those who are interested in the educational and social work carried out through the apostolic initiatives of the faithful of Opus Dei. The vicar of the prelate in each country appoints those who wish as cooperators, after they have been proposed by a member of Opus Dei.

Among the cooperators of Opus Dei there are some who are not Christian and some who are not believers. They are united by their desire to participate and help in the different initiatives which are

## 4 COOPERATORS OF OPUS DEI

promoted by Opus Dei in the service of society, and which are always open to all.

Religious communities can also be appointed cooperators of Opus Dei. The cooperation of these communities (which currently number several hundred) consists of daily prayer for the work of Opus Dei.

# 5

## APOSTOLIC INITIATIVES

“Opus Dei’s main activity consists in offering its members, and other people, the spiritual means they need to live as good Christians in the midst of the world”<sup>14</sup> explained the founder. With this formation, the individual members carry out their apostolic activity, being witnesses to Jesus Christ in their own surroundings. Personal testimony is always the most important apostolate in Opus Dei. It is an apostolate of witness, of personal help given to others, at work and in the other circumstances of daily life; a personal apostolate carried out through word and example.

Besides this personal apostolate, the faithful of the prelatore and the cooperators, together with many other Catholics and non-Catholics throughout the world, set up educational, charitable and cultural undertakings, which are secular in nature, with the clear aims of rendering a service to society. These include schools, hospitals, universities, centres for professional formation, and suchlike.

These apostolic ventures respond to the real needs of the country or environment where they are set up, and are financially and professionally managed by those who set them up, with full personal responsibility.

The prelatore can assume responsibility for ensuring the Christian spirit of an undertaking by providing doctrinal guidance and pastoral

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<sup>14</sup> *Conversations with Mgr. Escrivá*, 27.

## 5 APOSTOLIC INITIATIVES

care. A formal agreement to this effect is established with those in charge, in accordance with the statutes of the undertaking. All ventures of this kind fully respect the freedom of individual consciences. In any case these activities are always unmistakably directed to educational or social needs. The prelatore does not involve itself in any profit-making, commercial or political ventures.

Such agreements with the prelatore do not modify the civil nature of these entities in any way. Responsibility for their functioning and government always rests with their directors who are always civil persons or entities.

There are two basic types of agreement:

- a) In the case of the “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, but without officially giving any moral guarantee as regards the formation offered in those initiatives. This spiritual assistance can take a variety of forms, such as priestly ministry or religion classes, doctrinal assessments, etc.

### **5.1 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:

## 5 APOSTOLIC INITIATIVES

- The *University of Navarre* ([www.unav.es](http://www.unav.es)), founded in Pamplona, Spain, in 1952. It has 20 faculties. The Pamplona campus also includes a university hospital. The *Institute for Higher Business Studies* (IESE) is part of the university and has branches in Barcelona, Madrid, New York and Munich ([www.iese.edu](http://www.iese.edu)).
- *Monkole*, in Kinshasa, is a hospital which every year attends to thousands of people in situations of extreme need. Medical assistance is also given at travelling 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*, ([www.punlaan.com](http://www.punlaan.com)) in Manila, 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* ([www.midtown-metro.org](http://www.midtown-metro.org)), in Chicago. 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 the 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.

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- *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 Kenya is an educational foundation set up in 1961 for the promotion of social and spiritual welfare of women in Kenya ([www.kianda-foundation.org](http://www.kianda-foundation.org)).

# 6

## ORGANISATION OF THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE

### 6.1 PERSONAL PRELATURES

The Second Vatican Council created the juridical structure known as the personal prelatore, as reflected in the Council decree *Presbyterorum ordinis* (7 December 1965), 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. In this way the Church could more aptly respond to the demands of its mission in the world.

On 6 August 1966, with his *Motu Proprio*, *Ecclesiae sanctae*, Pope Paul VI opened the way for the creation of the personal prelatures which had been envisaged by the Council. In this document, he specified the possibility that lay faithful could bind themselves to the personal prelatures that would be established in the future by means of a bilateral agreement between the lay person and the prelatore.

One year later, on 15 August 1967, Paul VI stipulated, in the apostolic constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae universae* (49,1), that personal prelatures should report to the Congregation for Bishops, and that they would be established by the Roman Pontiff after hearing the views of the relevant episcopal conferences.

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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 agreement with the jurisdictional body in question. The last-mentioned applies in the case of military ordinariates and personal prelatures.

The Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church stipulates that each personal prelate must be regulated by general Church law and by its own statutes. At the head of a prelate there is a Pastor (a prelate, who may be a bishop, who is appointed by the Pope, and governs the prelate with power of governance or jurisdiction). Together with the prelate, there is a presbyterium, and the lay faithful, men and women, over whom the prelate exercises his jurisdiction.

Personal prelatures are, therefore, institutions belonging to the hierarchical structure of the Church, with the special feature that its faithful continue to belong to the local churches or dioceses where they have their domicile.

For these reasons, personal prelatures are clearly different both from associations and movements of the faithful, and from religious institutes and the consecrated life.

### **6.2 THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE**

Opus Dei already formed a single organism made up of laity and priests cooperating in a pastoral and apostolic task which was international in its scope. This specific Christian mission consisted in



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spreading the ideal of holiness in the middle of the world – in daily work and in the ordinary circumstances of life.

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 prelatore. In 1969 work started on this, with members both of the Holy See and of Opus Dei taking part.

The work was completed in 1981. After this, the Holy See sent a report to over 2,000 bishops of dioceses where Opus Dei already had a presence, so that they could offer their observations. Once this latter phase had been completed, Opus Dei was established by John Paul II as a personal prelatore of international scope. The document effecting this was the apostolic constitution *Ut sit*, of 28 November 1982, which was formally executed on 19 March 1983. At the same time the Pope promulgated the Statutes, which constitute the particular pontifical law of the Opus Dei prelatore. The Statutes were the same as those prepared by the founder years before, with some minor amendments which were necessary to adapt them to the new legislation.

### **6.3 GOVERNING REGULATIONS FOR OPUS DEI**

The Opus Dei prelatore is governed by the provisions of the general law of the Church, by the apostolic constitution *Ut sit*, and by its own Statutes (or code of law specifically applicable to Opus Dei).

The Code of Canon Law of 1983 sets out the basic provisions covering personal prelatures in canons 294-297.

## ORGANISATION OF THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE

Priests of the prelature depend fully on the prelate. He assigns to them their pastoral responsibilities, in the fulfilment of which they closely follow the pastoral guidelines for the diocese in which they live. The prelature is responsible for the financial support of its priests.

The lay faithful also depend on the prelate in all that refers to the specific mission of the prelature.<sup>15</sup> They are subject to the civil authorities in the same way as any other citizen, and to other ecclesiastical authorities in the same way as any other lay Catholic.

### **6.4 STRUCTURE OF THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE**

The prelate – and his vicars who represent him – has jurisdiction in Opus Dei as proper Ordinary of the prelature. Nevertheless, the style of government in the prelature is collegial. The prelate and his vicars always carry out their work assisted by councils, made up largely of laity.

In governing Opus Dei, the prelate is helped by a council for women (called the Central Advisory) and another for men (the General Council). Both are based in Rome.

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.<sup>16</sup> At these congresses the work of the prelature is studied, and the proposed direction of its future pastoral activity is presented to the prelate. During the congress the prelate appoints new councils.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 125.2.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 133.

## ORGANISATION OF THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE

When it is necessary to appoint a new prelate, a general elective congress is convened. Following the provisions of general and particular law, the prelate is chosen from among those priests of the prelature who fulfil the conditions of age, length of time in Opus Dei, priestly experience, etc.<sup>17</sup> His election must be confirmed by the Pope,<sup>18</sup> who thereby confers the office of prelate on the person elected.<sup>19</sup> The current prelate is Bishop Javier Echevarría.

The prelature 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. Each centre is governed by a local council, which is headed by a layperson (the director), and consists of at least two other faithful of the prelature. These local positions carry the responsibility of giving the collective means of formation – to the other faithful and to anyone else taking part in the apostolic work – according to what has been laid down by those with jurisdiction (the vicars of the regions or delegations with their Councils), of giving

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 131.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 130.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 178-179.

## ORGANISATION OF THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE

spiritual guidance to the others, and of being responsible for the apostolic and material organisation of the centres. For the priestly care of the faithful attached to each centre, the Ordinary of the prelate assigns a priest from his presbyterate.

No office of government, other than that of the prelate, is held for life.<sup>20</sup>

### 6.5 RELATIONS WITH THE DIOCESES

The Opus Dei prelate is a jurisdictional structure belonging to the pastoral and hierarchical organisation of the Church. Like dioceses, territorial prelatures, vicariates and military ordinariates, it has its own autonomy and ordinary jurisdiction to carry out its mission in the service of the whole Church. For that reason it is dependent immediately and directly on the Roman Pontiff,<sup>21</sup> through the Congregation for Bishops.<sup>22</sup>

The authority of the prelate extends to the matters to do with the specific mission of the prelate:

- a) The lay faithful of Opus Dei are subject to the authority of the prelate in all that refers to the fulfilment of the ascetical, formational, and apostolic commitments which they take up by the formal declaration incorporating them into the prelate.<sup>23</sup> By virtue of their content, these commitments do not interfere with the authority of the diocesan bishop. At the same time, the

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 125-129.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 171.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Apostolic Constitution, *Ut sit*, art. V.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 27.3 and 125.2.

## 6 ORGANISATION OF THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE

lay faithful of Opus Dei continue to be faithful of the dioceses in which they reside, and thus remain under the authority of the diocesan bishop in exactly the same way and regarding the same matters as any other Roman Catholic in the diocese.<sup>24</sup>

b) According to the provisions of the general law of the Church and the particular law of Opus Dei, the deacons and priests incardinated in the prelature belong to the secular clergy and are fully under the authority of the prelate.<sup>25</sup> They are to foster fraternal relations with the members of the diocesan presbyterate,<sup>26</sup> and observe with all due care the general discipline of the clergy. They can form part of the council of priests of the diocese. Diocesan bishops may, with the prior consent of the prelate or his vicar, appoint a priest of the presbyterate of the prelature 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 prelature and the dioceses within whose territory the prelature 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 prelature without the prior consent of the local bishop.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 172.2.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 125.2.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 41 and 56.

## ORGANISATION OF THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE

b) When it is wished to erect a church of the prelate, or to entrust to the prelate an existing church or a parish, 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>27</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>28</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. 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 prelates.”*<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, art. 180.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, art. 174.2.

<sup>29</sup> Address, 17 March 2001, 1 (*L’Osservatore Romano*, 18 March 2001, p. 6).

## ORGANISATION OF THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE

The authorities of Opus Dei aim to foster the unity of all the faithful of the prelature with the diocesan pastors, encouraging them to familiarise themselves with and to put into practice – in accordance with their personal, family and professional circumstances – the directives and guidelines issued by the diocesan bishops and the episcopal conference.<sup>30</sup>

### 6.6 FINANCIAL MATTERS

All the faithful of the prelature are responsible for providing for their own personal and family needs by means of their ordinary work.<sup>31</sup>

Besides covering their own living expenses, the members of Opus Dei and the cooperators 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 and the central offices in each region or delegation; the costs of the Office for the causes of the saints; 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 the prelature, with the assistance of the cooperators of Opus Dei 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.

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, arts. 174.2 and 176.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 94.2.

## ORGANISATION OF THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE

As stated previously, these initiatives are managed by the people who set them up, who are fully responsible for all organisational and financial aspects.<sup>32</sup>

Each undertaking is financed in the same way as any other similar institution: e.g. by residential fees, grants, donations, etc. Corporate works regularly run at a loss, given the type of work they undertake and the fact that they are not intended to be profit-making. For this reason, in addition to donations from the faithful of Opus Dei and from the cooperators and others, they may receive official subsidies from government agencies, as well as grants from private foundations or companies.

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

Further information:

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Statutes*, 122.



# 7

## OPUS DEI IN GREAT BRITAIN

The work of Opus Dei in Great Britain began in 1946. At present there are over twenty centres in and around London, Oxford, Manchester and Glasgow.

Opus Dei's first corporate undertaking, in 1952, was Netherhall House ([www.nh.netherhall.org.uk](http://www.nh.netherhall.org.uk)), an inter-collegiate university residence for men in Hampstead, London. A larger purpose-built extension funded in part by the British Council and the GLC was opened by the Queen Mother in 1966. The final phase was inaugurated by the Duchess of Kent in 1995, increasing the capacity to over 100. Netherhall House admits students of all faiths and none.

Other student residences in Britain include Dawliffe Hall and Ashwell House ([www.ashwellhouse.org.uk](http://www.ashwellhouse.org.uk)), inter-collegiate halls of residence for women in London; Greygarth Hall ([www.greygarth.org.uk](http://www.greygarth.org.uk)) and Coniston Hall ([www.conistonhall.org.uk](http://www.conistonhall.org.uk)), both in Manchester. There are also two centres in Oxford: Grandpont House ([www.grandpont-house.org](http://www.grandpont-house.org)) and Winton.

Courses of various types for the general public, including preached retreats, are organised regularly in three conference centres: Wickenden Manor in West Sussex ([www.wickendenmanor.org.uk](http://www.wickendenmanor.org.uk)), Thornycroft Hall in Cheshire ([www.thornycroft-hall.org.uk](http://www.thornycroft-hall.org.uk)), and Hazelwood House in Glasgow ([www.hazelwoodhouse.org.uk](http://www.hazelwoodhouse.org.uk)).

For those interested in the Catering and Hospitality industry, education and training can be combined at Lakefield

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([www.lakefield.org.uk](http://www.lakefield.org.uk)) where NVQ courses are offered to school leavers.

Catering education centres such as Lakefield and Bracklyn, both in London, offer NVQ courses for school leavers wishing to gain qualifications for the hospitality industry.

As well as the on-going adult Christian formation provided, Opus Dei centres organise courses and seminars on spiritual, moral, educational and cultural themes.

A number run activities for young people, examples being Kelston Club in Wandsworth ([www.kelston.org.uk](http://www.kelston.org.uk)) and Tamezin Club in Chelsea ([www.tamezinclub.org.uk](http://www.tamezinclub.org.uk)), both in London, and Dunreath Club in Glasgow ([www.dunreath.org.uk](http://www.dunreath.org.uk)).

The faithful of the Prelature are involved in educational and social activities in several places, including inner-city areas of London, Glasgow and Manchester.

Further information on Opus Dei and its activities can be obtained by contacting the information office on 020 7221 9176. The e-mail address is [info@opusdei.org.uk](mailto:info@opusdei.org.uk) Alternatively, addresses and phone numbers of individual centres are given on the website [www.opusdei.org.uk](http://www.opusdei.org.uk) and in the yearbooks of the dioceses where they are situated.

The present Regional Vicar in Great Britain is Mgr Nicholas Morrish.

Further information:

- [www.opusdei.org.uk](http://www.opusdei.org.uk)

# 8

## SOME DATA ON THE PRELATURE

### 8.1 PEOPLE

The prelature is made up of more than 90,000 people, of whom about 2,000 are priests.

Further information:

- *Anuario Pontificio* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011)

Apart from the priests of the prelature, some 2,000 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, Great Britain

**1947** France, Ireland

**1949** Mexico, United States

**1950** Chile, Argentina

**1951** Colombia, Venezuela

**1952** Germany

**1953** Guatemala, Peru

**1954** Ecuador

**1956** Uruguay, Switzerland

**1957** Brazil, Austria, Canada

**1958** Japan, Kenya, El Salvador

**1959** Costa Rica

**1960** Holland

## SOME DATA ON THE PRELATURE

**1962** Paraguay  
**1963** Australia  
**1964** Philippines  
**1965** Belgium, Nigeria  
**1969** Puerto Rico  
**1978** Bolivia  
**1980** Congo, Ivory Coast, Honduras  
**1981** Hong Kong  
**1982** Singapore  
**1983** Trinidad and Tobago  
**1984** Sweden  
**1985** Taiwan  
**1987** Finland  
**1988** Cameroon, Dominican Republic  
**1989** Macao, New Zealand, Poland  
**1990** Hungary, Czech Republic  
**1992** Nicaragua  
**1993** India, Israel  
**1994** Lithuania  
**1996** Estonia, Slovakia, Lebanon, Panama, Uganda  
**1997** Kazakhstan  
**1998** South Africa  
**2003** Croatia, Slovenia  
**2004** Latvia  
**2007** Russia  
**2008** Indonesia  
**2009** Korea, Romania  
**2011** Sri Lanka

# 9

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appointments within the organisation, opening of new centres, apostolic activities of the corporate works, etc. Further details including cost of subscription can be obtained from: *Romana*, 524 North Avenue, New Rochelle, New York 10801, USA.

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