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Document: Path Toward the Centenary

Opus Dei will celebrate the centenary of its foundation from 2028 to 2030. To prepare for this anniversary, we offer a document entitled "Path Toward the Centenary." It contains some ideas for the faithful and friends of Opus Dei to reflect on these 100 years and how the charism will continue giving life to the Church and society.

01/09/2024

On November 15, the Father called the faithful of Opus Dei and its friends to participate in the preparations for the regional assemblies (Work Weeks) which will have the theme: On The Road to the Centenary of the Work. Going More Deeply into Our Charism and Renewing Our Desire to Serve God, the Church, and Society.^[1]

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The importance of the centenary invites us to ask ourselves how to respond to the challenges of the present time in light of the spirit of Opus Dei. We want to celebrate the centenary of the Work in every place looking towards the future.

“The celebration of the centenary,” the Father wrote to us, **“will run from October 2, 2028, to February 14, 2030, the hundredth anniversary of the beginning of Opus Dei’s work with women. It will be a single celebration with two dates, as an expression of unity (...). I hope that we will all participate in the preparation”** (the Father’s message, June 10, 2021). For those of us who form part of this family of the Work, it will be an opportunity to delve more deeply, with the light of faith and the grace of God, into the greatness of God’s love that calls each one of us. It is also an occasion to better appreciate

the beauty of the Work's mission of service to the Church and society.

This document offers some ideas that can inspire our reflection on the centenary as an opening of the second century of Opus Dei's history. It is intended to stimulate all of us to participate by submitting suggestions and experiences that the participants in the upcoming regional Work Weeks will study. The conclusions of the Work Weeks will provide important reference material for the Ordinary General Congress of 2025, and will guide the preparation of the centenary.

Therefore, more than just celebratory events, the preparation for the centenary is intended to generate a movement towards greater depth that will help us to understand, embody, and communicate our spirit ever better,

at the service of the Church and of all men and women.

The centenary offers us, above all, a new opportunity to rediscover the essence of our existence: the love God has for each one of us, who calls us in his Son, with the gift of the Holy Spirit, to be his children. The Father reminded us once again, a few years ago: **A Christian's *fidelity* is a *grateful fidelity*, because we are not faithful to an idea but to a Person: to Christ Jesus, our Lord, who, we can each say, "loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Knowing that we are personally loved by God impels us, with his grace, to a faithful and persevering love. A love full of hope in what God will do in the Church and the world, through the life of each one of us, even in our *fragility* (Message of the Father, June 10, 2021). Therefore, the preparation for this date encourages us to be true**

contemplative souls in the middle of the world, and increasingly so each day.

Challenges of our time

This anniversary, the Father also told us, **“is a good moment to consider the challenges facing the Church and society and to ask ourselves how we can contribute better”** (the Father’s message, June 10, 2021). St. Josemaría invited us to “love the world passionately.” He was referring to the real world in which we live, with its possibilities and its contradictions. The world is a living reality, evolving and changing. “Each generation of Christians must redeem and sanctify its own time” (*Christ is Passing By*, 132). Loving the world presupposes knowing and understanding it. Therefore, the centenary encourages us to look at our societies and our times in order

to illuminate them with the light of the Gospel.

The charism of Opus Dei is unfolding today in environments that in many respects are different from those of a hundred years ago. “The changes in historical circumstances – with the modifications that they introduce in the way society is shaped – can make something that was just and good at a given moment, cease to be so.

Therefore, you must unceasingly exercise a constructive critical attitude, which will make it impossible for the paralysing and disastrous action of inertia to take effect” (St. Josemaría, Letter 29, 18). As the challenges of each era change, the generations of those who incarnate the spirit of Opus Dei are being renewed, so that they can give current and life-giving responses to new challenges with the same vigour as the first members.

We should reflect on the current situation of work, the family, relationships, culture, justice, and peace, because these are what we are called to sanctify; and also on themes that in recent years have gained special prominence and have made their mark on our societies, or that will foreseeably be relevant in the coming decades. It is a question of understanding better, with the eyes of a child of God, what the world, which we passionately love and want to serve, is really like, and what it needs. We need to discover so many good realities that surround us and, at the same time, the many aspects that are not in keeping with human dignity. In the words of St. Josemaría, it is a question of asking ourselves how to remain receptive to all that is good, with “a positive and open attitude towards the current changes in society and in ways of living” (*Furrow*, 428); or, in other words, how to update and increase our

desire to bring the message of Christ to all environments, to so many people who need it.

Let us also consider the Church's current challenges, which are our own: secularization and the need to discover how to proclaim God's love today; the role of the laity and families in evangelization; the dynamic of tradition and renewal; unity and dialogue; the implications of ecclesial communion; and so forth. The charism that God entrusted to St. Josemaría is oriented toward "serving the Church as the Church wants to be served" (words of St. Josemaría at the inauguration of the Elis Center, November 21, 1965). Knowing well the challenges of the Church in each country, and the universal Church, will help us to strengthen our availability for this mission.

Rediscovering the gift of the Spirit

In his message of June 10, 2021, the Father proposed that this be a time of reflection on **“our identity, our history, and our mission,”** with a vision of the future and a desire for personal renewal.

The beginning of the preparation for the centenary has coincided with the publication of the *Motu Proprio* “*Ad charisma tuendum*,” with which the Holy Father encourages us to fix our attention on the gift that God gave to St. Josemaría, so as to live it fully.

Pope Francis exhorts us to care for the charism of Opus Dei “to promote the evangelizing action carried out by its members” and, in this way, “to spread the call to holiness in the world, through the sanctification of work and family and social occupations.” The message that God wanted St. Josemaría to transmit has an extraordinary force of attraction, and unlimited applications that stimulate creativity.

In thinking of texts that could help in this preparatory reflection for the Work Weeks, many of St. Josemaría's writings that develop aspects of the charism of Opus Dei come to mind. Among many other possibilities, three of his letters are suggested here:

The first is Letter 29,^[2] written to highlight aspects of the mission of the Work's faithful and friends in the sanctification of the world and of married and family life. It constitutes a call to all Christians to participate with Jesus Christ in the redemption, not to remain indifferent, to act as leaven in the dough, to be "a leaven that will divinise men and, in making them divine, will make them at the same time truly human" (no. 7).

The second is Letter 6,^[3] which deals with various aspects of the spirit of Opus Dei. St. Josemaría deals with different themes linked by the

common thread of the specificity of the spirit he preaches, of its roots in the Gospel and its similarity to the life of the first Christians.

The third is Letter 4,^[4] which deals with charity in the transmission of the faith. St. Josemaría explains how evangelizing dialogue with men and women who want to approach the faith of the Church should be carried out, combining a spirit of understanding and respect for the freedom of consciences with fidelity to the deposit of faith.

Examining attentively the context in which we live, and sharing our reflections with others, will put us in a better position to seek appropriate ways to communicate, with our words and our life, the Christian message and the spirit of Opus Dei. Precisely because of its secular nature, Opus Dei's spirit constitutes a bridge of dialogue in the areas of

work, family, interpersonal relationships, our immediate surroundings, science, art, and politics: a hand outstretched to meet all those who seek to come closer to the truth, to promote the dignity of persons and of creation, to do good and create beauty.

In the face of complex situations and accelerated change, the words of St. Augustine are still valid today: “Bad times, hard times, this is what people keep saying; but let us live well, and times shall be good. We are the times! Such as we are, such are the times.” (*Sermon 80:8*). Thus, the first renewal we seek is our own. To bring the world closer to God, we seek first of all to come closer to him ourselves, to be contemplatives in ordinary life.

Past, present and future

The celebration of the centenary brings together the past, present, and future; gratitude and hope, a request

for forgiveness and grace. Pope St. John Paul II, at the end of the Jubilee of the year 2000, encouraged us to look at the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm, and to look to the future with hope: “*Duc in altum*” (Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 1). In the same way, when special anniversaries came up, Blessed Alvaro prayed: “Thank you; forgive me; help me more.” These expressions can serve as inspiration for the centenary.

It will be a time of gratitude, acknowledging God’s gift of the charism of the Work, the life of our Founder, and the many graces received over the years. Gratitude to all the people who have made an effort to give life to this spirit in their own environment. And also to the people and institutions that have accompanied us: parents and families of the faithful of the Work, men and women who collaborated

with St. Josemaría, Catholics and non-Catholics who have generously helped and are generously helping Opus Dei throughout the world. We wish to be especially mindful of all those who have been part of this family at some point in their lives during these first one hundred years, with whom we have a special bond.

Together with gratitude, it will be a time to ask for forgiveness: for our personal and collective limitations, for omissions, and for the harm that each of us has caused. The memory of the past should bring about a rediscovery of the origins and essence of the charism, of its originality and value, but also a deepening in history, in people and concrete moments, with their lights and shadows: history – personal or institutional – is part of identity.

Finally, it will be a time of hope, with confidence in God's grace and in the

timeliness and strength of Opus Dei's charism to illuminate the most complex realities, now and in the future. We trust in the power of the Holy Spirit, not in our strength. In this way, we also prepare ourselves for the ecclesial Jubilee of 2025, the first of the third millennium. It will have as its theme "Pilgrims of Hope" (Pope Francis, *Letter to Bishop R. Fisichella for the Jubilee of 2025*, February 11, 2022).

Going more deeply into our charism has an individual dimension that directly affects each person. But it also has an institutional dimension that affects all the very different undertakings that the members of the Work have been raising up, with the grace of God, over the decades.

In thinking about the latter, the key question is how each person can make a significant Christian contribution in his field: education,

health, poverty, youth programs, the family, communication, etc. so that he spreads the Gospel with breadth and depth. May each person involved in these initiatives think about its origin and find a way to make the professional and apostolic goals that gave them life shine even more brightly. They should advance with renewed commitment that may involve changing direction if the social needs that gave rise to them have changed, or to close a stage that will allow the beginning of another more suitable to the current demands of the Church and society.

This requires understanding each project's identity and history, transparency, and the effort to develop its unique narrative. In these efforts, it is helpful to listen to the opinions of alumni, the families who are served by the programs, and other people who make up the environment in which they operate.

Among the neediest

The centenary, as the Father reminded us, is a new opportunity for **“recognizing God’s love in our lives and bringing it to others, especially to those most in need”** (Message, June 10, 2021).

We find Christ in the revealed Word, in the sacraments, and also in others, especially in the poor. Pope Francis has told us: “We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 198). St. Josemaría used to recall that he found, in the poor and the sick, the strength to move Opus Dei forward and that he counted on their prayer as the most valuable.

Whatever our situation, we will always have people in need around us. The love that moves us to engage with them is intimately linked to the recognition that each of us needs God and others, and detaching ourselves from what encloses us in personal interests alone. Poverty of spirit reminds us that we find our treasures in God and in interpersonal relationships, and that to lead a generous and joyful existence we have to live detached from material goods in a real way in today's consumerist society. As St. Josemaría said: "A friend of ours used to say: 'The poor are my best spiritual book and the main motive of my prayers. It pains me to see them, and in each one of them, Christ. And because it hurts, I realize I love him and love them'" (*Furrow*, 827).

Through our professional work and the rest of our ordinary lives, we can

contribute to spreading God's love among those who need it most. The world of family, work, and social relationships needs witnesses of collaboration, mutual support, and austerity for the benefit of others, our brothers and sisters, all in accordance with a secular way of following the style of Jesus. Our way of life is at the heart of credible evangelization.

The unprecedented development that humanity has achieved in the fields of technology, finance, and communication offers a great number of resources that help to eradicate inequalities and alleviate the shortages of food, affection, housing, work, education, rights, health, and freedom... We perceive these deficiencies as a denial of something proper to the dignity of the person and the right order of society. These individual and social challenges, which are global and

complex, call for a new “creativity in charity” (Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 50), which, from its closeness to those who suffer, contributes to the integral development of the person, thus being an expression of God’s personal care for each of us.

Our founder stated that “a man or a society that does not react to suffering and injustice and makes no effort to alleviate them is still distant from the love of Christ’s heart” (*Christ is Passing By*, 167). Today, on the cusp of the centenary, we are offered **“a special opportunity to revitalize our service to the needy in personal or collective ways, with greater awareness of its importance in St. Josemaría’s message”** (The Prelate of Opus Dei at *Be to Care*, conference, 29 September 2022). This quote from the Father’s speech offers valuable elements for reflecting on a re-imagined charity.

In these years of preparation for the centenary of the Work, we can reflect on the social dimension of the Christian vocation, the relevance and scope of the social doctrine of the Church, and the consequences of the sanctification of work in the building of a more human and Christian society. We can also consider the possible social legacy of the centenary as a tangible expression of the gratitude we feel for the gifts we have received.

God makes all things new (Rev 21:5)

“The youngest will have a fundamental role to play,” the Father said in his message of June 10, 2021. It is they who will carry St. Josemaría’s message into the next hundred years. “Everything has been done and everything remains to be done,” St. Josemaría would sometimes say.

Youth is not just a biological fact. It is a trait that can be maintained over time. “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day” (2 Cor 4:16). God’s grace renews us if we open ourselves to it. And God renews the world, all things, all environments, with the collaboration of Christians who want to be ambassadors of his mercy.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría invited us to “a renewal of fidelity to the divine call, to be sowers of joy and peace in the world” (Christmas Letter, December 1952). Now, as the centenary approaches, we can rediscover the beauty of the foundational charism and think about it, live it, and transmit it with fidelity, creativity, and joy in the present circumstances of the Church and the world, both personally and

institutionally. We thus respond to the call of Pope Francis, who has summoned us since the beginning of his pontificate to “a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1).

To our Lady, cause of our joy, and to St. Joseph, model of fidelity, we entrust the path to the centenary.

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^[1] “Josemaría Escrivá instituted in Opus Dei the Regional Assemblies or Work Weeks as an instrument for reflection, participation and listening to the members of the Work. From the first moment they had a consultative character and were a channel for each one to express their own opinion on themes related to the spirit and the ways of spreading Opus Dei throughout the world” (José

Luis González Gullón, “*Las semanas de trabajo en los años fundacionales*”, *Studia et Documenta* 17, 2023, p. 268).

[2] *Studia et Documenta* no. 17 (2023): 279-351 (<https://www.isje.org/setd/2023/SetD-17-2023-10-CANO.pdf>).

[3] Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, *Collected Letters (II)*, Scepter (2023): Letter no. 6.

[4] Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, *Collected Letters (I)*, Scepter (2022): Letter no. 4.

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