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Memories of Bishop Javier Echevarría

Nicola Waite, a member of Opus Dei's Central Advisory in Rome, shares some memories of her time working with Bishop Javier Echevarria. "You could see as he talked that he was in constant conversation with God – you felt like he was talking to God, and encouraged you to do the same. And as somebody who was new to this whole world of the Catholic faith, that was very attractive. It was something that I felt...I want that!"

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Can you recall the first time you saw Bishop Javier Echevarria?

The first time that I saw the Prelate of Opus Dei, I was not a Catholic, and I saw him on a stage in an open-air gathering in Santiago de Chile in 1997. And he was talking to a crowd of people – families, mums, dads, kids were all running around – and he was talking to them about daily life, giving them solutions, giving them ideas: things they could put into practice to help unite their faith with how they live in daily life. And he connected with them, something that really struck me as somebody who was not a Catholic, somebody who didn't really understand all the words because I didn't understand Spanish so well at that time, but I saw that there was a connection, and

that he really reached out to them. You could see as he talked that he was somebody that was in constant conversation with God – you felt like he was talking to God, and encouraged you to do the same. And that for me as somebody who was new to this whole world of the Catholic faith, who had had no contact before, was very attractive. It was something that I felt...I want that!

What was the Prelate like as a person?

I think you could say so many things, but he was definitely somebody who loved people and who wanted to be with them. He had an extraordinary memory for people's birthdays, maybe people's concerns – for example, if somebody had a loved one who was sick. Once he called me, and he said, "Have you called Antonietta?" Antonietta is the mom

of a priest, Fr. Robin, who lives here in Rome. When he said, “Have you called Antonietta?” I said, “Why, Father?” He replied, “Because today’s her 90th birthday.” I said, “Father, I hadn’t remembered.” He said, “Call her on my behalf. Call her and tell her that I’m praying for her.” That’s what he was like. Remembering those little things, wanting to reach out to people as much as he could. Somebody once asked him, “Father, how do you remember?” And he said, “If you pray, you remember.”

Can you describe his way of governing?

The way of governing of the Prelate has struck me ever since I arrived here six years ago. Firstly because I arrived only having been in Opus Dei for 11 years, and here was a man in his 80’s with so much experience, having lived with Saint Josemaria and Blessed Alvaro. But he had asked

me and other women to come to Rome to work with him. And I felt completely inadequate – I still feel hugely lacking in experience – and yet I felt the trust that he had from the very beginning. He would entrust us with tasks and never doubt that we would fulfill them. I remember that after six months of being in Rome, he called me and he said, “Would you go to the States – would you go to the United States on a trip on my behalf?” And there wasn’t time in the conversation to say, “I don’t feel up to it - I don’t feel I can.” He just communicated, “You can do it!” – not by saying that but just by the way he was – and he didn’t leave any space for you to kind of doubt. So I feel that working with him, I’ve learnt that he just “launched” us. He’s launched me to reach further, to be more than I ever would have imagined.

How did he encourage the family and the New Evangelization?

One of the things I've seen the Father really encouraging us to work on is supporting the family. Ever since the Year of the Family that Pope Francis called us to have in the Church last year, and with the publication of Amoris Laetitia, the Father's been encouraging us to work on all those guidelines that the Pope has given us. Just recently, the Father had a meeting with families that are running family enrichment courses, where couples come together, discuss a case, and ideas on how to help family life be happier and be better. He used to always say to couples to love one another, to love one another *first*, and then to love the children. To love one another even though there are difficulties, even though there are challenges in family life, and to go through those difficulties together.

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