

# Vatican Declaration on Opus Dei

This is the Vatican document, issued by the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and approved by Pope John Paul II, that explains the fundamental traits of the Prelature of Opus Dei.

03/19/2001

SACRED CONGREGATION FOR  
BISHOPS

Declaration concerning Opus Dei

The Second Vatican Council provided for the setting up of personal prelatures which would engage in "particular pastoral work" (Decl. Presbyterorum Ordinis, n. 10 par. 2). These Prelatures, which were later regulated juridically in the pontifical legislation applying the conciliar Decrees (cf. Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae Part I, n. 4), are a further proof of the sensitiveness with which the Church responds to the specific pastoral and evangelizing needs of our time. For this reason, the pontifical act erecting Opus Dei as a personal Prelature, with the name Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, is directly aimed at promoting the apostolic activity of the Church, inasmuch as it puts into operation a new pastoral instrument, which up to now was only foreseen and desired in the law of the Church, and it does so through an institution which offers proven guarantees of apostolic vigor, discipline and

faithfulness to the teaching of the Church.

At the same time the pontifical decision provides Opus Dei with an ecclesial configuration fully in keeping with its foundational charism and sociological structure. While solving the institutional situation it makes the insertion of the institution in the organic pastoral activity of the universal Church and of the local Churches even more perfect, and in that way renders its service more effective.

As can be seen in the norms by which the Holy See regulates the structures and activity of the Prelature, while duly respecting the legitimate rights of diocesan bishops, the chief characteristics of the Prelature which has been erected are the following:

## I. Organization

- a) the Prelature Opus Dei is international. The central offices of the prelate, who is the ordinary of the Prelature, and of his councils, are in Rome;
- b) the clergy of the Prelature, incardinated therein, are derived from the laity incorporated in the Prelature. Therefore no candidate for the priesthood, deacon or priest is withdrawn from the local Churches;
- c) the laity (men and women, single or married, of all professions and social situations) who dedicate themselves to the service of the apostolic purpose of the Prelature, with a serious commitment, do so in virtue of a clearly defined contract, and not by vows.

II. The Prelature Opus Dei is a secular jurisdictional structure, and therefore:

a) as established in the general law of the Church and in the law of the Prelature, the clergy incardinated in the Prelature belong to the secular clergy to all effects. They therefore maintain close relations with the secular priests of the local Churches and, with respect to priests' councils, they enjoy an active and passive voice;

b) the laity incorporated in the Prelature do not alter their personal situation, canonically or theologically. They continue to be ordinary lay faithful and act accordingly in all matters and, specifically, in their apostolate;

c) in the aims and spirit of Opus Dei stress is laid on the sanctifying value of ordinary work, that is to say, on the obligation to sanctify work, to sanctify oneself in ones' work, and to turn it into an instrument of the apostolate. Therefore, the work and

apostolate of those who form part of the Prelature are normally carried out in the structure and environment of secular society, bearing in mind the general indications which the Holy See or diocesan bishops may give concerning the apostolate of the laity;

d) as regards decisions in professional, social, political matters, etc., the lay faithful of the Prelature enjoy, within the limits of Catholic faith and morals and of the discipline of the Church, the same freedom as other Catholics, their fellow citizens; hence, the Prelature does not make itself responsible for the professional, political or economic activities of any of its members.

### III. The jurisdiction of the prelate

a) the power of the prelate is an ordinary power of jurisdiction or government, limited to that which refers to the specific finality of the

Prelature, and differs substantially, by reason of the matter involved, from the jurisdiction of the diocesan bishops in the ordinary spiritual care of the faithful;

b) as well as the government of the clergy of the Prelature, the jurisdiction of the prelate includes the general direction of the formation and of the specific apostolic and spiritual attention which the laity incorporated in Opus Dei receive, to help them live a more intense dedication in the service of the Church;

c) together with the right to incardinate his own candidates to the priesthood, the prelate has the obligation to attend to their specific formation in the centers of the Prelature, in conformity with the norms established by the competent Congregation, and to the spiritual life and the permanent formation of the

priests promoted by him to Holy Orders. He is also obliged to provide for the proper support of his clergy, and for their care in old age and in the case of illness, etc.;

d) the laity are under the jurisdiction of the prelate in regard to what has to do with the fulfillment of the specific ascetic formative and apostolic commitments which they have freely undertaken by means of the contractual bond dedicating them to the service of the aims of the Prelature.

IV. With reference to ecclesiastical territorial laws and to the legitimate rights of local ordinaries:

a) as established by law the members of the Prelature must observe the territorial norms which refer to general directives of a doctrinal, liturgical and pastoral nature, the laws concerning public order and, in

the case of the priests, also the general discipline of the clergy;

b) the priests of the Prelature must obtain the ministerial faculties of the competent territorial authority, to exercise their ministry with people who do not form part of Opus Dei;

c) the laity incorporated in the Prelature Opus Dei continue to be faithful of the dioceses in which they have their domicile or quasidomicile and are, therefore, under the jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop in what the law lays down for all the ordinary faithful.

V. In regard to the pastoral coordination with local ordinaries, and the fruitful insertion of the Prelature Opus Dei in the local Churches, it is also established that:

a) the prior permission of the competent diocesan bishop is required for the erection of each

center of the Prelature. The diocesan bishop is informed regularly about the activities of those centers and has the right to visit them, *ad normam juris*;

- b) as regards parishes, rectoral churches or other churches, and also other ecclesiastical offices which the local ordinary may entrust to the Prelature, or to the priests incardinated in the Prelature, an agreement will be drawn up in each case between the local ordinary and the Prelate of Opus Dei or his vicars;
- c) in each country the Prelature will maintain regular contact with the president and with the organisms of the episcopal conference, and have frequent contact with the bishops of the dioceses in which the Prelature is established.

VI. The Priestly Society of the Holy Cross is an association which is inseparably united to the Prelature

Priests of the diocesan clergy who wish to strive for sanctity in their ministry in accordance with the spirituality of Opus Dei may form part of this association. These priests, by virtue of their membership in the association, do not form part of the clergy of the Prelature. They remain, to all effects and purposes, under the jurisdiction of their own ordinary, whom they will inform, if he wishes, of their membership in the association.

VII. The Prelature is under the Sacred Congregation for Bishops (cf. *Ap. Const, Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, n. 49, par. 1), and, like the other autonomous jurisdictions, is entitled to deal directly with the relevant Congregation or Department of the Roman Curia, according to the nature of the matter involved in each case.

VIII. Through the Sacred Congregation for Bishops, the prelate will present to the Roman Pontiff, every five years, a detailed report on the state of the Prelature, and on the development of its specific apostolate, both from the juridical and from the pastoral points of view.

The Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, by Divine Providence Pope, in the audience granted to the undersigned Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops on 5 August 1982, approved, confirmed and ordered to be published this Declaration concerning the erection of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei.

Rome, Sacred Congregation for Bishops, 23 August 1982.

+ SEBASTIANO Card. BAGGIO, Prefect

+ LUCAS MOREIRA NEVES,

Tit. Archbishop of Feradi maius,  
Secretary

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