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## **"A woman of steel, in following Christ"**

A testimony to Rosario "Charo" Basterra, who helped begin Opus Dei's apostolic work with women in Nigeria. The story includes an amateur video by Chinenye O.

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In Nigeria, elderly people are honored and celebrated when still alive. And even more so at their death. Charo Basterra had a strong constitution and had been going well even into her 80s. So two years ago,

on her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, there was a great outpouring of gratitude and love and joy from all the people she had helped come closer to God! She responded in a brief video, in which she told us how happy she was with our greetings for her birthday, and her wishes and prayers for us to be faithful to Christ, which in the end is the only truly important thing.

On the evening of Friday, 18 October 2019, Charo passed away in Lagos surrounded by those she loved. Born on the 25 October 1927 in Spain, Charo joined Opus Dei in 1956, and was the oldest of the three Numeraries who came to start the apostolic activities of Opus Dei with women in Nigeria. She arrived on 7 November 1972 at the behest of St Josemaría.

Everyone has stories about how Charo has affected their lives. I

would like to share some of them with you here.

Ifeoma describes her as *“a woman of steel, undaunted by difficulties, full of faith, loving, dedicated and ambitious for the things of God.”*

Charo was involved in the beginnings of Opus Dei in Nigeria. She had come six months earlier with Olga Marlin from Nairobi, to do the necessary legwork for opening a Secretarial College in Lagos. Since then, she spent 47 years in Nigeria working tirelessly for the advancement of Nigerian women.

Charo was strong willed. Her conversations were straightforward, often direct and to the point. Thus, she could ruffle feathers, even though she was able to manage this aspect of her character well, such that she made many lasting and warm friendships throughout her life. She also had a somewhat sharp

sense of humour, with an infectious laugh. She was slow to accept excuses, "naysayers" and obstacles as permanent, but with a realistic outlook, she was able year after year to "power" so many "miracles" in this quite difficult country.

Charo was the quintessential 'leading by example' woman. She travelled to different parts of Nigeria and worked not only in the establishment of university residences and schools of hospitality in Ibadan, Enugu and Lagos, but also in the setting up of centres of Opus Dei in a number of places, generously passing on her knowledge and skills in these areas to the students, carpenters and gardeners who worked with her. She also made trips from Lagos to help in the beginnings of Opus Dei's apostolic work with women in Cameroon.

*Ali remembers that “one of the things that struck me most in Charo was her simplicity and straightforwardness. She never wanted to attract attention to herself. In a course with her this Easter, I was edified by her punctuality and attendance in all the means of formation.”*

Many people were unanimous in their experience of having been edified by Charo’s example. Seeing the piety with which she did the Stations of the Cross, her careful genuflections; and at home, her efforts to clean the house even at her advanced age; going down to the road to wait for a friend who had got lost looking trying to locate her residence, and so on.

After her funeral and reminiscing about her life, Ogene reflected, *“I worked with Charo for several years and though at the beginning we had to try to understand each other, in the*

*end, I found that she just approached things in a common-sensical way. And that appealed to me.”*

*“I learnt a lot about sincerity and simplicity from her,” Ngozi recalls. “I’d always thought sincerity was easier for older people till she explained to me sometime in 1992 that it would always be hard! I have been very edified by her saying clearly what the problem was, resting when she needed it and then getting up without a fuss as soon as she felt better. When she was holding posts of government, I was always struck by her directness and clarity. She was frank. Yet I never felt hurt because she had a way of grasping the situation and being understanding.”*

There are many stories of Charo helping her friends to improve. Bose said that *“she never let my faults pass without letting me know about them and I appreciated it. And she always*

*showed trust in me and prayed for me.”*

With Charo's death, we reach a certain milestone in the history of the Prelature of Opus Dei in Nigeria. Really, we have always been at this stage: the stage of fidelity, of asking for the grace to be more and working tirelessly for the apostolic growth of the Church. The new thing is that now Charo works with us from heaven.

May her soul and the souls of all the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace. Amen.

**by Chiaka Anumudu**

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