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Father Joseph Escribano (1933-2023), a Pillar for the Beginnings of Opus Dei in Canada

2023-06-30

Born on May 31, 1933, in Spain, Father Joseph, affectionately called Fr. Joe, immigrated to Canada in 1959, where he played a significant role in Opus Dei's growth. His 64 years of priestly ministry touched the lives of countless Canadians.

José María Escribano Esteban came from Amusquillo, near Valladolid. He asked to join Opus Dei on 7 March 1950. He studied medicine in that city and then in Zaragoza. In 1953, he moved to Rome to study theology, obtaining a doctorate in canon law. During his years in Rome, he lived with the founder of Opus Dei, where he often heard the saint explain the spirit of the Work. He was ordained a priest on 4 August 1957, and later that year, he boarded a ship sailing to the United States. For two years, he ministered to members of Opus Dei and their friends, mainly in Milwaukee.

In 1959, Fr Joe joined the first members of Opus Dei that had arrived in Montreal in 1957 at the invitation of Cardinal Léger. By the sixties, many married and single Canadians were inspired by Opus Dei's spirit. Shortly after arriving in

Montreal, Fr Joe became the head of Opus Dei in Canada.

In the fall of 1961, he developed a mass between the lungs and was diagnosed with lung cancer. People close to him prayed to the Venerable Isidoro Zorzano for a cure (see <https://opusdei.org/en-ca/article/isidoro-cured-me-of-cancer/>). The surgeons who operated on him to remove the mass found no traces of it.

He exercised his pastoral work in Montreal and Quebec City for almost fifty years. In January 2011, he moved to Ottawa, where he had a fruitful ministry. Even though he had to reduce his pastoral activity in the last years due to his declining health, he displayed a remarkable priestly zeal, always available to help others spiritually.

He preached with passion and directed countless souls. His medical

training stood him in good stead, for example, in giving advice on medical ethics. He read widely and loved to play the harmonica. For years he played soccer and tennis and followed sports with interest. He was known for his sense of humour and a great ability to get on well with people.

On the occasion of his ninetieth birthday, his brothers in Opus Dei and many friends celebrated with him at Parkhill, the university students' residence where he lived. That seemed to revive him, as he was able to preach two evenings of recollection in June. But on the morning of June 24, he had a major CVA a few minutes before celebrating Mass. When the paramedics were preparing to take him to the hospital, he was asked whether he wanted to be with Jesus, Mary, Joseph and Saint Josemaria, and he replied, "Oui." He passed away at the dawn of June 25,

surrounded by the prayers and affection of his spiritual brothers and friends who came to pray for him and with him at l'Hôpital Montfort. That Sunday was the anniversary of the ordination of the first three priests of Opus Dei in 1944 and the eve of the feast of Saint Josemaria Escriva.

The Prelate of Opus Dei sent a letter to his Canadian children upon learning of Fr. Joe's passing: "This is not a time - it never is - for sadness. Consider that we can thank God for José María's generous correspondence, his availability to do Opus Dei wherever it was necessary, and his example, which, like that of so many people in the Work, helps us to be aware that it is always worthwhile to give our whole life to the Lord."

Visitation: Thursday, June 29, 2023, 2-5 pm, and 7-9 pm, at the Central

Chapel of Hulse, Playfair & McGarry
Inc., 315 McLeod Street, Ottawa.

Funeral Mass: Friday, June 30, 2023,
10:30 am, at St. George's Parish, 415
Piccadilly Ave N, Ottawa. Livestream

You are invited to make a donation to
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(2025-12-10)