

Father Joseph Múzquiz: Engineer and Priest

Father Joseph was one of the first three priests of Opus Dei and led its early apostolic efforts in the United States. His cause of canonization is open in the Archdiocese of Boston.

09/17/2025

This sketch of Father Joseph Múzquiz is from John Coverdale's book and podcast "Encounters: Finding God in All Walks of Life." *Encounters*

presents profiles of people living Saint Josemaria's message of finding God in everyday life.

The profiles have been released as an audio podcast series, available on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#), or wherever you listen to your podcasts. You can also purchase the entire book from [Amazon](#) or [Scepter Publishers](#).

Father Joseph Múzquiz was a civil engineer who joined Opus Dei in 1940 shortly after the end of the Spanish Civil War. He was one of the first three priests of Opus Dei and played a major role in starting the apostolic activities of Opus Dei in the United States, Canada, and Japan.

Youth

José Luis Múzquiz was born in 1912 in southern Spain. He entered the

School of Civil Engineering in 1930, after attaining the second-highest score among nine hundred applicants on the national entrance exam. Although the idea of living celibacy in the world struck him as “something odd and strange that could not succeed,” José Luis accepted a friend’s invitation to meet Opus Dei’s founder in late 1934 or early 1935. He was very impressed when, in their first conversation, Escrivá said, “There is no greater love than Love,” and he decided to attend the weekly classes on practical Christian life which Escrivá called “Circles.”

While waiting for a job to open up after graduation, he traveled to Germany to improve his German and visit civil engineering projects. He was there when the Spanish Civil War broke out in July 1936, but he immediately returned to Spain and joined the Nationalist Army. He felt

sure that Escrivá must have been killed by the violently anti-Catholic mobs that dominated Madrid during the early months of the civil war. When he learned that Escrivá had not only survived but had succeeded in escaping from Madrid and crossing to the Nationalist zone, he concluded that Opus Dei must be something “supernatural and desired by God.”

In January 1940, he joined Opus Dei. From then on, his life was shaped by the conviction that he and the other members of the fledgling Work were, as Escrivá had written, “not just men who have joined other men to do a good thing. That is much, but it is little. [They were] fulfilling an imperative command of Christ.” His overriding goal was to incorporate Opus Dei’s spirit into his own life and to contribute to spreading it as the specific way in which God wanted him to serve the Church. Escrivá’s

prediction was fulfilled in him: “The conviction of the supernatural character of the Work will make you happy sacrificing yourself for its accomplishment.”

Escrivá almost immediately asked him to take over one of the classes of practical spiritual formation he had been giving to college students.

Múzquiz’s professional competence, calm, poise, good humor, and piety were an inspiration both to other young members of Opus Dei and to students who were thinking about their possible call to Opus Dei.

Laureano López Rodó, a future Commissioner of Economic Development and Minister of Foreign Affairs, but at the time a law student, was struck by Múzquiz’s smiling good humor when they met in Barcelona in 1940. During a conversation with Escrivá in Madrid a short time later, López Rodó began to think about dedicating himself

fully to God in the world as a member of Opus Dei. At first, he was enthusiastic, but as the hours wore on he began to think that such a vocation was “marvelous but impossible. But then, seeing Múzquiz “so serene and smiling,” he recalls, “I immediately concluded: the life of total dedication is possible since José Luis Múzquiz lives it.”

A Priest of Opus Dei

In late 1941 or early 1942, Escrivá asked Múzquiz if he would be willing to be ordained a priest. Although he was aware that Escrivá still had not found any way in which Opus Dei could have priests ordained, he had complete faith that a way would be found. He began studying for the priesthood as if there were no obstacles. Preparing for ordination involved a formidable amount of work. In addition to the philosophical and theological studies

the Church required of all priests, Escrivá wanted the priests of Opus Dei to have a civil doctorate. At the time, no university in Spain offered a doctorate in engineering, so Múzquiz earned a doctorate in history. In 1943 Escrivá founded the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. This made it possible for Múzquiz and two other members of Opus Dei to be ordained in June 1944. José Luis immediately began to travel extensively to offer pastoral care for Opus Dei's incipient activities in southern Spain and Portugal.

Starting Opus Dei in the United States

In 1948, Escrivá asked Múzquiz to lead an effort to start Opus Dei in the United States. On February 17, 1949, he arrived in New York with Sal Ferigle, a young physicist. From the plane, he wrote to Escrivá:

We have been flying for five hours over a small part of America. A few minutes ago we passed over Boston. We picked out Harvard University ... and prayed to the guardian angel of the university and the guardian angels of each of the inhabitants. I think we will keep them busy. They must be sort of unemployed. The country is very big ... and very small. And all of it has to be filled with tabernacles We are very happy and have great desires to work. From the plane, you see immense horizons. What a great harvest!

From New York, Múzquiz, Ferigle, and José María González Barredo, who had been working professionally in the United States for some time, traveled to Chicago, where they would open Opus Dei's first American center. They were soon joined by two other lay members of the Work. During their early months in Chicago, they faced

formidable challenges. They had no money, had few friends, spoke little English, and were unfamiliar with the way of doing things in the United States.

Faced with these challenges, Múzquiz had recourse first of all to prayer. He wrote to Escrivá at the end of March: “Every day I see more clearly what you have told us so often about the need for personal sanctity. I feel small and unworthy, but I see that our Lord loves me a great deal, and I want to love him a great deal.”

For Opus Dei to carry out its mission of serving the Church in the United States, it was essential to find young men and women who would dedicate their lives to God in Opus Dei and would try to put its spirit into practice and spread it to others. For that, a vital first step was to get to know young people whom God might

be calling to this path of service to the Church. One place to do that was Calvert House, the Catholic Club at the University of Chicago. Múzquiz also contacted some Catholic high schools and in many cases found the priests and brothers who taught there anxious to help him meet students who might be interested in Opus Dei's message.

The First Opus Dei Center in the United States

In Spain and other countries, Opus Dei had opened student residences near major universities. They offered a homelike environment, an atmosphere of serious study, and an opportunity to receive the sacraments and Christian formation. They had greatly facilitated Opus Dei's apostolate with students. From the beginning, Múzquiz and the other members of the Work planned

to open a similar student residence in Chicago.

The only suitable building for sale near the University of Chicago was a fifteen-room brick house just a few blocks from the campus. When the real estate agent asked Father Joseph if he could make a down payment of \$25,000, Múzquiz thought he was asking if they could pay a total price of \$25,000. Although they only had \$2,000 at the time, he said yes. Later he clarified that the most they could put down would be \$10,000.

Sometime later he dropped that to \$7,000, and eventually he confessed that they could only come up with \$5,000 as a down payment. The agent was so impressed with Father Joseph's sincerity, innocence, and acceptance of God's will that he offered to donate his entire commission to help them put together the down payment. The seller, convinced that the credit of a

Catholic priest was good, offered to give them a first mortgage for two-thirds of the value of the house. In August 1949, they took possession of the house which they would call Woodlawn Residence. As Múzquiz wrote, they were essentially “broke,” and there was no money to buy furniture. Nonetheless, they moved in immediately.

They were pleased to find around the house a few old beds, a large dining room table, a smaller table that Father Joseph used as a portable altar to celebrate Mass, and a few wooden boxes they used to supplement the one chair they found in the house, which was immediately dubbed “The Chair.” Little by little, various people they had met gave them used furniture. Coming from a country where skilled labor was cheap, they were shocked at the cost of hiring painters, electricians, and other workers. Coming from a

country where doing-it-yourself was virtually unknown, they had no experience in remodeling, but they made up for their lack of knowledge with enthusiasm and goodwill. They recruited some boys they had met to help with painting, and a little more than three weeks after moving in, a temporary oratory was finished. On September 15, 1949, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, Father Joseph celebrated Mass in the oratory and for the first time left the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle of a center of Opus Dei in the United States.

Múzquiz was delighted to have Christ present in the tabernacle of the center. He wrote to Escrivá: “We are very happy to have our Lord at home with us. We don’t know how to thank Him for having wanted to stay among us. Here, far away, one notices even more the need to unburden oneself with Him and to

thank him for everything he has given us and is going to give us.”

First Steps in the Apostolate

From their base in Woodlawn Residence, Father Joseph and the others worked steadily at putting together a group of young men whom they could help to develop a solid interior life of prayer and sacrifice, some of whom might receive from God a call to Opus Dei. By the end of October, they had a large enough group to be able to have a meditation and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament on Saturday evenings, and began organizing classes of spiritual formation patterned on the ones Múzquiz had attended himself in the 1930s. Father Joseph told the Founder: “The spiritual life is something new for them. It is a joy, however, to sow the seed, and when it begins to develop the harvest will be enormous. We are

happy and we are beginning to see palpable fruits in some of the boys."

At the end of their first year in the United States, Múzquiz reflected on the experience gained thus far. He and the other members of the Work had explained the vocation to Opus Dei in some depth to more than forty young men who they thought might be called to the Work. Writing to Escrivá, he commented:

The young men continue not to respond. I don't know if it is because they have a different mentality, that they have received poor formation, or if we still don't know how to deal with them. We are filled with peace by your saying that our work is very pleasing to our Lord and that the fruits will come soon. I think at times that perhaps things don't work out because our Lord is not pleased with us, but I try to reject that thought as a temptation. When I see the

enthusiasm and the effort of some of my brothers, I feel sure that our Lord will soon do great things in Chicago.

First Vocations

The first American to join Opus Dei was Richard Rieman, a former Naval aviator who was working as the technical director of the mounted units at “Frontiers of Freedom,” a summer show with a cast of 150, presented on the lakefront at the Chicago Fair. He joined Opus Dei in July 1950. In late 1950 and the first half of 1951, there was a flurry of new members, but only Rieman would persevere. Looking back on those events, Múzquiz saw a parallel with what had happened to Escrivá in the early days of Opus Dei when almost none of the very first members persevered.

The major apostolic activities at Woodlawn for several years were three-day retreats for groups of ten

to twelve high school boys. They were a way of getting to know more students and teaching them the rudiments of the spirit of Opus Dei, especially the sanctification of their studies and the rest of their daily life. At times, especially during Lent, Father Joseph would preach several retreats a week. His schedule was grueling. Often he finished one retreat in the morning and began another the same afternoon. In each retreat, in addition to saying Mass, preaching five or six half-hour meditations a day, and hearing confessions, he tried to have at least one personal conversation with each participant.

Those conversations were the heart of the retreat for many of the boys. They were effective because Father Joseph was so thoroughly a man of God. One person observed, “He had not the slightest hint of pretension about him, and neither did he show

any particular interest in talking as an ‘educated man’ or as one able to discuss current issues and cultural topics. . . . He didn’t talk about himself at all.” Another person completes the picture: “His cheerfulness, his smile, his words, everything about him, inspired confidence. He was the sort of person whom you would tell, with great naturalness, the most intimate aspects of your life.”

In 1948 Opus Dei had opened in Rome an international center of formation for men called the Roman College of the Holy Cross. There, members would study philosophy and theology and learn the spirit of Opus Dei directly from the founder. Some would be ordained priests of Opus Dei, and all of them would become much better equipped to live their calling and spread Opus Dei’s spirit to others. In 1952, Escrivá suggested that Múzquiz think about Americans who could go to Rome.

Father Joseph immediately began making plans to send people.

In the fall of 1954, Múzquiz sent Dick Rieman and one other American to Rome. The following year he was able to send a larger group. By Christmas 1955, a total of seven male members from the United States were studying at the Roman College. That same year, the first two American women members went to Opus Dei's international center of formation for women, the Roman College of Holy Mary. The pace quickened during the following years. In fall of 1956, nine Americans arrived at the Roman College of the Holy Cross. They were followed in 1957 by another six. Heading to Rome for several years when they were just beginning their professional careers or still studying at the university might have seemed imprudent or even crazy, but Father Joseph trusted in God's providence.

Sending a high proportion of the American members of the Work to Rome for formation involved serious sacrifices for Múzquiz as well as for the young men who pulled up stakes to go. It deprived Múzquiz of people who could help Opus Dei spread in the United States. With few exceptions, the centers were staffed almost exclusively by people who had joined Opus Dei only a short while before.

Despite the obvious drawbacks, Múzquiz was convinced of the value of sending many people to Rome. There they could live with the founder and learn the spirit of Opus Dei from him. They could spend time with members of the Work from many different countries and acquire a personal sense of the universality of the Church and the Work. They could study philosophy and theology in depth, and some could train for the priesthood. In a few years, when

they returned to the United States, as priests or as well-formed laymen, the benefits for the apostolate would be enormous.

Even in the short run, God blessed Múzquiz's generosity in sending people to Rome. In July 1955 he observed that "the apostolate is going much better than in other years. In fact, since the first Americans left for the Roman College, we have experienced a big push. In the year since they left, there have been quite a few more vocations than in the previous five years." Msgr. Cormac Burke, an Irish priest of Opus Dei who arrived in the United States in 1955, confirms this observation:

When I first arrived in the States, I began to realize something of his concern to send those who had joined the Work to Rome to receive formation directly from St. Josemaría, as he had. His policy —

which would not be normal in other times, but then showed an extraordinary depth of faith — was to send everyone he could to Rome, leaving the centers almost deprived of native members. Nevertheless (or more probably as a result of this exercise of faith) vocations continued to come in abundance in all those following years.

Years later, St. Josemaría commented that Father Joseph had been outstanding in grasping the importance of sending as many people as possible to Rome for formation.

Working in Rome

In 1961 Escrivá called Múzquiz to Rome to serve as a member of Opus Dei's international governing body, the General Council. When he left the United States, centers existed in Boston, Washington, St. Louis, Milwaukee, Madison, Wisconsin, and

South Bend, Indiana. From the handful of people who accompanied Múzquiz in the early days in Chicago, Opus Dei had grown to several hundred members in the United States. Half a dozen young American professional men had been ordained as priests of Opus Dei, and a sizable number were studying philosophy and theology in Rome. Many of them would be ordained and others would return to help direct and expand Opus Dei's activities in the United States. Some would go to other countries to start Opus Dei there. In addition, Opus Dei was getting started in both Canada and Japan, thanks in large part to Father Joseph's efforts.

At the end of September 1961, Múzquiz took up his new position as Central Priest Secretary. His duties involved working with Escrivá and the women responsible for directing Opus Dei's apostolic activities with

women throughout the world. Serving on the General Council, like serving on any of the regional or local governing bodies of Opus Dei, was a collaborative, collegial affair. Most of the work was done in writing. Meetings were few and brief. Múzquiz had long been accustomed to this way of working, but previously it had occupied a fraction of his time, which was mostly taken up with preaching, hearing confessions, giving spiritual direction, and traveling to cities where Opus Dei had centers.

Father Joseph had greatly enjoyed transmitting the spirit of Opus Dei to people through direct personal contact and loved traveling. In Rome, days and even weeks could go by in which he hardly ventured out of the buildings where he lived and worked, rarely seeing anyone except other members of Opus Dei. His days were taken up with paperwork.

Escrivá reminded him and the other members of the General Council that they needed to see souls behind the papers and realize that their work made a direct contribution to bringing people closer to God. Convinced that this was true, Father Joseph offered his work for the people who would be directly affected by the projects he was working on, for friends and acquaintances, and for people in contact with Opus Dei's apostolates whom he had heard about but had not met. He cannot, however, have found this as immediately gratifying as dealing personally with people and seeing them grow in the love of God.

Even in a setting where hard work for the love of God was the norm, Father Joseph's seemingly endless capacity for work stood out. He worked very quickly, and his co-workers found his style and work

habits distinctly “American.” Escrivá and the people who lived with him had to take pains to get him to rest and to take care of his health, since he didn’t complain even when suffering from migraine headaches. One person who worked closely with him says that he would not even have known that he had migraines unless someone else had told him.

Leading Opus Dei in Switzerland

Opus Dei’s activities in Switzerland had begun in 1956, but in 1963 they were still struggling. The women of Opus Dei had not begun working in the country, and the men had a single center, Fluntern, a small student residence in Zurich. Escrivá hoped Múzquiz’s vibrant faith, drive, and enthusiasm might produce a breakthrough. He was aware, however, of the contrast between the highly structured character of Swiss society and Múzquiz’s restless,

freewheeling personality and rapid-fire style. Wanting him to see the virtues of the country before asking him to direct Opus Dei's apostolate there, he sent him in late 1963 to visit and report back. As Múzquiz was leaving, Escrivá spoke with him enthusiastically about Switzerland's importance as an international crossroads and about the "colossal" work that could be done there to contribute to Opus Dei's activities in many countries.

In July 1964 Múzquiz left Rome to head Opus Dei's activities in Switzerland. Immediately upon arrival, he threw himself into adapting to the country. During his years in Rome he had picked up some Italian, but his French and German were very limited. Nonetheless, he quickly began to hear confessions and preach in all three languages. German was especially challenging, but with

careful preparation, he soon began to preach half-hour meditations in simple but correct German.

Hans Freitag, at the time a member of the governing body of Opus Dei in Switzerland, recalls that Múzquiz immediately set a “new, accelerated, pace in all our work. He was an example of hard work and good use of time.” Building on his experiences in the United States, he suggested offering courses for high school students on study methods and introductions to the professions. The courses proved popular and brought many students into contact with Opus Dei. He had the building that housed the student residence remodeled, creating three separate zones. The student residence occupied the ground floor and the upper floors. Offices and living quarters for the Regional Commission were located in a semi-basement. In what had been a dirt-

floored cellar, they created a large activities area with a study room. Much to the surprise of many, Father Joseph rapidly raised the necessary funds for the project from local businesses.

Múzquiz quickly set his sights on Geneva as a target for Opus Dei's expansion, but the focus shifted to Fribourg when Pope Paul VI told Escrivá in a private audience that he hoped Opus Dei would soon begin apostolic activities in that city where an important Catholic university was located. Soon they purchased a house in Fribourg for a student residence.

Shortly after Múzquiz's arrival, an avant-garde of two women of Opus Dei came to start the Work's activities with women in Switzerland. Although at first there were only the two of them, Múzquiz came to their house every day to say Mass on an improvised altar. In frequent

meditations preached to these women, he insisted repeatedly on the same themes: love of God and confidence in him, doing things as the Father wanted them done, apostolate. Although both he and they were native Spanish speakers and it was slow work for him to prepare meditations in German, he began to preach to them in German almost immediately to help them learn the language.

The women had no sooner gotten started in Zurich than Múzquiz began urging them to make trips to Geneva. When they had been in the country a year and had held one German summer course for foreign students, he suggested they look for a house in Fribourg so that the next summer they could have a German course in Zurich and a French course in Fribourg. Money was tight, and one of the women observes that they managed only “thanks to his

encouragement. Humanly it didn't make sense, but it worked."

Escrivá had pointed out to Múzquiz the importance of Switzerland as a world crossroads, and he quickly began to seek out foreigners who might understand Opus Dei. By hearing confessions in French, German, Italian, and English in a nearby parish, he met people from other countries. Some began to attend Opus Dei activities and a few eventually joined the Work.

Back to Spain

In the spring of 1966, Múzquiz was only fifty-four, but he had been working extremely hard for many years and was aging rapidly. Escrivá decided it would be good for him to return to Spain and take a less stressful position. At first, he was assigned as chaplain of an Opus Dei center in the southern city of Cádiz. As he did throughout his life,

Múzquiz cheerfully accepted this new assignment. After about a year, he was reassigned as chaplain of Pozoalbero, a large conference center located in the countryside near Cádiz.

Múzquiz adapted quickly and apparently effortlessly to his new situation. Despite having spent most of his adult life in positions of authority in Opus Dei, he demanded no special attention, passing unnoticed as just one more priest. In this regard, Múzquiz was a magnificent example of the aspect of Opus Dei's spirit and practice that Escrivá described in a 1974 letter:

"Young persons and those not so young have gone from one place to another with the greatest naturalness, or have persevered faithfully in the same spot without growing tired. When needed they have completely changed their work,

leaving behind what they were doing and undertaking a different task of greater apostolic interest.... . They have joyfully accepted hiding and disappearing, letting others move past them: going up and coming down."

Pozoalbero had facilities for retreats, workshops, and other activities for adults, along with an area for activities for young people. In a separate part of the compound, there was a center for the administration, the women who formed the permanent staff of the conference center and were responsible for running it and taking care of meal service and housekeeping.

Father Joseph's principal duties were to provide spiritual care to the women who worked in the administration and to support their personal apostolate with women who lived in the area by giving

meditations and classes, and by hearing confessions. The task of preaching the retreats held at Pozoalbero and ministering to the people who came there for workshops and other activities normally fell to priests who accompanied each group, although Father Joseph often volunteered to help hear confessions and give personal spiritual direction.

His assigned duties were minimal, compatible with a quiet semi-retirement in the country, but his ten years in Pozoalbero were a whirlwind of activity. He threw himself with extraordinary generosity into the pastoral care of the women who worked in the administration and the support of their apostolate with local people. In addition, he heard confessions and gave spiritual direction in nearby parishes and Opus Dei centers. He frequently visited one hundred

parish priests scattered around towns and villages in the area, organized retreats and days of recollection, and carried on a vigorous personal apostolate with many other people — including Americans stationed at the nearby naval base at Rota.

The physical labor of running a large conference center at a time when modern appliances were still unknown in southern Spain was often overwhelming. The women who worked in the administration understandably felt they had little time for recreation or apostolic activities beyond what they were already doing: running a small catechism class and supplementary education program for girls from the immediate area and giving formation to members of Opus Dei in the area. On days when the conference center was unoccupied, they often took advantage of the break to clean more

thoroughly, but Múzquiz would tell them that the house was already clean and would urge them to take the opportunity to get out and enjoy themselves.

He was especially interested in helping them extend their apostolate to more people. That seemed impossible for lack of time, but he helped them devise a work plan that gave each of them at least two free afternoons weekly — time to visit friends or run apostolic activities. He urged them to keep a master list of all the women and girls they had met or even heard about, ranging from the wives of owners of vast rural estates to Romani girls living in shacks. Frequently he helped them review the list and make plans for working with each person on it. No matter how tired or concerned with the problems of running the center they were, he managed to rekindle their enthusiasm for the apostolate.

Not content with simply urging the members of Opus Dei who worked in the administration to reach out to more people, Father Joseph generously supported their projects. Each week he spent hours in the confessional ministering to local girls who could hardly read. He treated them with fatherly patience, even when several would crowd into the confessional simultaneously.

Múzquiz frequently visited the nearby American naval and air base at Rota where he made friends with a wide range of people. The attendance at an annual open house that he organized at Pozoalbero for Americans from Rota was so large the police had to control the flow of traffic. On several occasions, Protestant chaplains came with their wives.

Father Joseph organized and preached days of recollection and

even an occasional retreat in English. Among those attending were the commander of United States nuclear submarines in the Mediterranean, an Anglican chaplain, the head Catholic chaplain at Rota, and a Catholic chaplain from an American base in Morocco. A number of the Americans whom Múzquiz met at Rota became members of Opus Dei when they returned to the States.

A primary focus of Múzquiz's apostolic activities was the diocesan priests in the surrounding area. All priests need support, encouragement, and guidance in their spiritual life. Priests who, like most of those in the area around Pozoalbero, live isolated in small towns and villages need help to avoid falling prey to loneliness and discouragement. Supporting their brother priests is a specific apostolate of the priests of Opus Dei, and Escrivá encouraged Múzquiz to

dedicate himself especially to it, “loving them, dealing with them with affection, teaching them to serve the Church with refinement.”

Whenever Father Joseph passed through a town or village in his travels, he stopped briefly to visit the parish priest. If he found the priest in, he would chat with him for a few minutes. If the priest was out, he wrote a short note and went on. Not content with visiting those whose parishes were on his way, he would systematically visit priests in all the towns and villages of the area, no matter how small and out of the way and no matter how bad the roads. Many were grateful for his visits. “They want to talk and many times to open their hearts,” Múzquiz told Escrivá. “One told me, ‘I didn’t sleep all night I had so many worries. Fortunately, you came by so I had someone to talk with about them.’”

During the years Múzquiz lived in Pozoalbero, priests needed special help to assimilate the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and to distinguish between what the Council taught and the aberrations some justified as the “spirit of the Council.” Múzquiz tried to befriend all the priests he met, even those whom some other priests dismissed as “revolutionaries.” In most cases, he realized, it would be counterproductive to engage in theological debates, but “at least I can reach out to them with concern and affection.”

Múzquiz organized frequent talks, classes, days of recollection, and other means of spiritual and intellectual formation for priests. When Pozoalbero’s schedule permitted, he held one- or two-day workshops that included talks about a topic in the news. Because the facilities at Pozoalbero were often

not available and because it was hard for many priests to get there, Múzquiz also organized activities in roadside restaurants or homes. In his eyes, as important as the content of the talks and classes he organized was the opportunity for the priests to spend a few hours or days together, becoming better acquainted and establishing bonds of friendship, fraternity, and mutual support.

All this required driving over bad roads to reach remote villages in a SEAT 600, the cheapest car on the market, which was tinny, harsh-riding, and so small that it was hard to get in or out. With a twenty-one horsepower engine, it was badly underpowered. It had no air conditioning, although midday temperatures during the summer often hit 105 degrees Fahrenheit (40 degrees Celsius). Múzquiz frequently returned to Pozoalbero exhausted after a long day of driving in the

heat, but he entered the house smiling no matter how tired he was.

Thanks to Father Joseph's spirit of sacrifice, a large number of priests began to attend workshops, days of recollection, retreats, and informal lunches and dinners. In the course of a few weeks at the end of 1970, he talked to more than a hundred diocesan priests. Some of them eventually joined the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, a part of Opus Dei that provides diocesan priests guidance and support. It helps them seek sanctity by carrying out generously their priestly ministry and being closely united with their bishop.

In his apostolate with both priests and laymen, a large part of Father Joseph's time was spent hearing confessions and giving spiritual direction. He was effective as a confessor and spiritual director

because he combined deep faith, supernatural outlook, and love of God with humility and simplicity. What moved people was not so much what he said as who he was. As one person observed, “In a way that is hard to define, he had an extraordinary capacity to communicate a sense of God, and even of God’s presence, to everyone he met.”

A priest to whom he gave spiritual direction recalls that when he first met Father Joseph he was “confused and in conflict” due to difficulties arising from the tasks assigned to him by his bishop.

From the first time we met, he could see that I needed somebody to give me support. So he singled me out. He would invite me, “Let’s take a walk.” As we walked, we talked. He would let me unload a lot of my frustrations and angry feelings, and then give me

direction, so that by the time we came back, I was already feeling a lot more supported and at peace with things. The direction he gave me was very positive.

Thanks to Múzquiz's encouragement, support, and personal dedication, the apostolic activities conducted by Pozoalbero expanded greatly during his decade there. Many people of all social classes came closer to God, and a number discovered that God was calling them to Opus Dei.

Return to the United States

By 1976, Múzquiz's health had improved considerably and he had recovered his old energy. The head of Opus Dei asked him to return to the United States to head up activities there for a few years while Father Rafael Caamaño prepared to take over. Father Joseph gladly accepted the interim appointment. He

returned to the United States with just one small suitcase.

During the time Múzquiz spent at the helm of Opus Dei in the United States during this second stay, he managed to infuse a new sense of dynamism and energy into the apostolate.

Nonetheless, he was fully aware of how much remained to be done. As the thirtieth anniversary of his first arrival in the United States approached, he wrote to the head of Opus Dei:

It is a motive for thanksgiving to God, and at the same time to examine our consciences and see that things are going slowly — they have gone slowly, and they still are going slowly. We are just a few drops of water in the ocean that is this great country. I try, Father, to see things with serenity and a supernatural outlook and to encourage my brothers and sisters as much as I can.

Múzquiz's strong interior life was the foundation of his optimism and hope. A person who knew him well was impressed that he “never saw Father Joseph show signs of discouragement. He never lamented without hope the sad conditions of modern culture. He was keenly aware of individual and social sin against God and His Church, but he was so prayerful that they didn’t cause him anxiety or despair.”

As the time approached for Múzquiz's designated successor as the leader of Opus Dei in the United States to take over, Del Portillo, Escrivá's successor as head of Opus Dei, asked where he would like to go when he stepped down. Múzquiz replied:

You know that I have never expressed a preference for going to one country or another and that I would be happy in Spain, in the Ivory

Coast which I visited in 1976, or wherever I'm needed. But since Rafa [Caamaño] said you wanted me to write you, I have thought about it in prayer, asking our Father's aid. I think the best thing would be to remain in the United States. This is not only because of the affection I have for this country, and especially for the members of the Work. The principal reason is that — although the people are good — I think they need to go deeper into the spirit and traditions of our family. I think that without the responsibilities of governing, I could continue to help as an older brother to transmit the marvelous family spirit that we have received from our Father.

Final Years

Múzquiz moved to Boston. There he served as chaplain of one center of the men's branch and three centers of the women's branch. He was

happy to make himself available for whatever was needed and took great interest in the apostolic activities of the people he worked with. Since the centers where he exercised his priestly ministry were widely separated, he had to spend much time getting from one to the other, especially in the final years of his life when he could no longer drive and relied on public transportation. His ability to serve these centers, one person observed, “can only be explained by his extraordinary dedication and spirit of service, his sense of order, and above all his zeal for souls.” Nor did he merely fulfill his duties. Each group he served, “felt Father Joseph was ‘their’ priest. He communicated a real interest and involvement in all places.”

On June 20, 1983, Múzquiz was in Arnold Hall Conference Center, south of Boston, to serve as chaplain and teach classes at a course for women

members of Opus Dei. While teaching, he suffered a severe heart attack. During the night of June 20, he died in the local hospital.

Father Joseph's cause of beatification and canonization was introduced in the Archdiocese of Boston in 2011.

pdf | document generated automatically from <https://opusdei.org/en-ke/article/father-joseph-muzquiz-engineer-and-priest/> (01/19/2026)