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Cardinal sees Archdiocese 'privileged' by Opus Dei presence

A reprint of an article in the New York Archdiocesan paper on a Mass celebrated by Cardinal O'Connor in commemoration of Opus Dei's founder, Blessed Josemaria Escriva.

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Some 1,000 members and supporters of Opus Dei heard Cardinal O'Connor

denounce as "bordering on calumny" the notion that "Opus Dei is concerned only with the wealthy and the well educated." The archdiocese is "privileged" by the presence of Opus Dei members the cardinal said in his homily at a Mass in St. Patrick's Cathedral June 26 commemorating the 23rd anniversary of the death of the movement's founder, Blessed Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer.

"I wish the myth about Opus Dei would be dispelled forever," he said.

Blessed Josemaria Escriva founded Opus Dei, or Work of God, in Madrid in 1928. Compared to a religious order by many, Opus Dei is a prelature, a diocese without geographical boundaries. (Its members retain their participation in their local parishes and dioceses.) Nearly 80,000 people from around the world belong to Opus Dei, which was designated a personal prelature

by Pope John Paul II in 1982. The Rome-based prelature is now headed by Madrid-born Bishop Javier Echevarria, 66, who was appointed by Pope John Paul II in 1994.

Its 80,000 members pursue a call to holiness in their professional lives and everyday circumstances. They include priests and married and single lay people. In the tristate area, there are 300 members. Some single members, including priests, live in Opus Dei's five houses in the archdiocese, three in New Rochelle and two in Manhattan.

Opus Dei conducts evenings of recollection and other spiritual activities in the New York area and sponsors two South Bronx tutoring programs staffed by volunteer college students and young professionals.

At the Mass, Cardinal O'Connor called on the insights of Blessed

Josemaria Escriva in his homily on St. Luke's Gospel in which Jesus instructed Simon Peter and the other Apostles to be fishers of men. He emphasized the last line of the reading, which called for the Apostles to leave everything behind and follow Jesus.

"If we don't give ourselves generously, we will find it difficult to follow Jesus," the cardinal said. "We can't fight adequately, victoriously with the devil if we have clung to anything.

"Unless we carry out a fruitful apostolate, our faith will prove barren," he added. "The kind of life Opus Dei offers as an ideal is the life of holiness to which everyone is called."

Among 20 concelebrants of the Mass were Auxiliary Bishop Nicholas A. DiMarzio of Newark N.J., and Msgr. James A. Kelly, regional vicar of Opus

Dei for the United States, who is based in New Rochelle.

Cardinal O'Connor said that Blessed Josemaria Escriva was "totally dedicated" to the Eucharistic sacrifice offered at Mass.

"There was no question in his mind about what happens on this altar," the cardinal said. "Christ is truly born again on the altar... This is not some mere symbol. This is Christ, the Son of God. coming among us once again."

After Mass, many Opus Dei members gathered informally in the back of the cathedral. Sim Johnston told CNY that belonging to Opus Dei for the last 10 years has helped to make him a better Catholic.

"It gives me spiritual direction," said Johnston, a writer who is on the executive board of Crisis magazine, a Catholic publication. A parishioner of

St. Thomas More parish in Manhattan, he is married and the father of four children.

"We've got to be like the early Christians," he said. "We are meant to re-evangelize the world."

Another married member, Andrea Barbuto of St. Augustine's parish in Ossining, said she was introduced to Blessed Josemaria Escriva's best known published work, "The Way," long before she joined Opus Dei three years ago.

A mother of five and a nurse with the Dominican Sisters Family Health Service, Mrs. Barbuto said that her membership in Opus Dei "gave me a way to understand the Gospel more and apply it to my own life."

Photo provided by Office of Information of Opus Dei.

John Woods // Catholic New York

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