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Conversations with God

Oluchi is a cooperator and a farmer from Aguobu-Iwollo. She talks about how she met Opus Dei and her new perspective on life, family and work. She is married with six children. Her name, Oluchi, means “God’s Work.”

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Farming is my talent

My name is Oluchukwu Mgbechi Angela. I am from Aguobu-Iwollo,

Enugu State. My husband is from Imo State, and we live here in Iwollo. I have six children.

My husband was the first person to be employed here in Iwollo Conference Centre. I began working here this year (2022). I was delighted to apply to work here because I was broke then. I had tried my hands at several small businesses -selling pap, earrings, crayfish- and nothing worked.

I didn't know that farming was my talent until now. My parents trained me to farm. I worked in the farm with my brothers while my step-sisters stayed at home to cook. I thought that was terribly unfair, and other people felt the same way. Now, I am glad that I know how to farm. My step-parents made me cultivate large areas of land to pay my school fees.

Here I use a hose to water the plants. I had never used it before, and I love it. From relating with members of Opus Dei, I understood that sanctification of work means doing my farming well. I began having conversations with God when I was farming. I tell God at the end of my day's work that I am finished with work for the day.

I have grown pumpkins and leafy green vegetables. I also planted corn. Farming is my talent. I love it.

My husband says the soap I make is good

We began a club for the women in the village where we were taught many things that have helped our families, like making chin-chin, puff-puff, body cream, bar soap. When someone in Iwollo Conference Centre noticed that I didn't have body cream, she quietly gave me a jar without my asking for it. We didn't

have any at home then, but now I can make body cream and soap so I do not need to buy from the market.

I think we could do this farming on a larger scale and involve more women from the village who are interested. That way, they, too, can earn money, join the club, and so be able to afford the dues, which are actually very little. We can make bar soap, liquid soap, buns, chin-chin, and custard, but our problem is money. If we had money, we would have started producing and selling these items for a profit. Since I began making liquid soap, I no longer need to buy soap. We use carrot, aloe vera, pawpaw as well as other items we buy from the market to make bathing soap. The regular soap from the market bleaches my skin and gives me pimples and rashes. It also makes me itch. All these stopped when I began using the soap I made. I told my husband, and he said he had

noticed it too; he said that the soap I make is good.

The day we learnt how to make body cream; I had washed my container thinking that I would take some home immediately, only to be told that it would not be ready that day. I cried out because we had no body cream left at home. I didn't realize that Auntie Ify heard my complaint. She asked me what was the problem, and I explained that we had no body cream left at home. My husband had earlier asked me for a list of the ingredients I needed for soap and cream so he could buy them for me in Enugu, but I discouraged him because I didn't think he would make a good buy. So, she understood why I cried out. Later on, she gave me some body cream to use that day as we needed it desperately. Now none of my children buys soap from the market because it causes them harm.

Our skin has improved! We learn a lot from the club.

Married members too

I met Opus Dei people through my husband, who was already working here. I felt out of place at first. They would come to my house to visit me, and I could see how they loved and cared for each other. That homely atmosphere, like being a family among them, attracted me. It made me think I would like to be one of them. I thought Opus Dei was only for the unmarried until I asked them, and they explained that **there were married members too**. So, I thought I could be one of them, but then I thought, **“I am not educated, I am not rich; how can I join them?”** Later on, I realized that they welcomed everyone: rich, poor, educated, and uneducated, and this gave me great joy because it meant I could join them.

I had jokingly told my husband that I would have become a celibate member if I had met Opus Dei before meeting him.

Holiness of life in my family, gardening and farming

Meeting members of Opus Dei has made me strive to live a holy life in my family and amongst my friends. I noticed the harmony among them. They are united like a family. I also teach people what I have been taught about the Gospel and living a holy life.

I used to quarrel with my husband, but now I have been taught how to resolve issues calmly. I do not get as agitated as I used to; now I am at peace. When I was having severe marital problems, the ladies from Iwollo gave me good advice, which changed the course of my marriage for the better. I would squabble with my husband till late at night, and I

would even cry the whole night. That was around the time when Aunty Zuby asked my husband to introduce me to her. I was expecting my second baby. I didn't want to go because I didn't think we had anything in common, and besides, I could not speak English. But I could speak Igbo with Aunty Zuby, and I felt at home. We began exchanging visits, and I began to feel at home. I now know how to wait till I was calm before talking to my husband and we have peace in our home.

I also like how people are corrected – kindly, good-humoredly, privately. That way, the person does not get upset. I tell my friends that it is better to give a correction to someone in private instead of in public so that it is easier for the person to accept and learn from it.

I hunger to be holy.

Humility is another thing I observed. I thought they learnt humility from what they read, but it is not just about reading. They welcome all - uneducated, educated, rich, and poor because even the lowly can be holy. Trying to be holy will make one righteous. I ask God to help me be holy.

Opus Dei has taught me to be holy in everything I do; I bear in mind that people look at me and want to emulate me. I try to make my work holy, which will also help people because this will make them want to do the same. Holiness is holiness in my family, farming, and all I do. Anyone who works for God ought to be holy. I genuinely desire to be holy.

When in a family there is cooking to be done, each one takes up a task

I notice how they live like a family, with each one taking some

responsibility for the good of the whole family. This family way of communication is beyond what happens between relatives or in society. The excellent family relationship is attractive and will make others want to emulate them. This is what I found appealing. I like how they live in harmony. They are an example of fraternity for me. Just like when in a family there is cooking to be done, each one takes up a task; different people can contribute to getting the water, food, wood and money. Everyone benefits and is taken care of when all these are put together. This is the way of life of Opus Dei that appealed to me and made me want to be a member. That unity of purpose is like what happens in a family.

I also encourage my friends to come and learn what Aunty Ify teaches us. Here we all are farmers and understand farming, so I tell them

that everything is not about farming and that there are other ways of generating income.

I hungered for the sacraments

I have learnt about charity, fraternity, mercy, friendship and so much here that I cannot tell it all even if I spoke till sunset.

I got married in the Catholic Church after having my second baby. My husband was attending Cherubim and Seraphim church then. He couldn't understand my desire to receive the Sacraments, which I could not do because I wasn't married according to the Catholic rites. He said we would get married in the Catholic church when he had made enough money. I begged him to reconsider. I hungered for the sacraments. We were able to get wedded in the church, and he even became a Catholic! I am so grateful for this. And it all happened because

of friendship. I actually wonder why they would want to be my friends because I am neither educated nor rich, but they love me all the same.

I remember when they came to visit me when I was heavily pregnant. I was pounding cassava. They took over the pounding, breaking down my resistance with cheerful joking. I was touched. This is why I believe that they are genuine, and I want to be like them. I used to avoid going to the Centre because I felt inadequate, but they would visit me all the same, even those who could not speak Igbo, like Aunty Pat.

Working at Iwollo Conference Centre

Even though I had known the ladies of Opus Dei since 2005, I never asked them for a job because I felt I couldn't communicate with them in English and that I wouldn't fit in. Later on, I realized that just as the

apostles shared with people of different languages on the day of Pentecost, I could communicate with them despite my language deficiency and inability to speak English. So, this went on till December 24th, 2021, when I was asked if I wanted a job with them. Before that, I went to the grotto of Our Lady and prayed for financial help because the family struggled financially. So, when I was asked if I would like to work with them, I was so happy but also concerned because I wasn't sure I would be able to do the type of tasks they would require very well. I was overjoyed when I was told I would be in charge of the farm and garden because I knew I could do that task very well. I was asked to go and write an application letter. I began work in February 2022 because I had to travel for a funeral and returned late in January 2022.

God is with me in everything I do

When I work, I talk with God. I know that God is with me in everything I do. I start with the sign of the cross, and then I tell God “I am beginning my work”; the same thing when I cook. I ask God to join me, and I tell him, “Lord, let me do my work with your strength and not by myself”; when I enter a car, I tell him, “Lord, I am travelling”, etc.

I was not attending Morning Mass, especially if the weather was bad, like during the harmattan season, if it rains, or if I had any obstacles. But now I go even when the weather is terrible and there is a rainstorm. May God bless my sisters in Opus Dei. May He bless those who have died and help us to follow in their footsteps.

Illiteracy is bad

We began a club for learning cookery and other new skills.

Aunty Ify will look for me when the club starts. I will give excuses and not come, all because I couldn't speak English. Illiteracy is bad! But she continued, and we became friends. I would ask myself, who am I for them to want to associate with me? I advise my friends to participate in the club so that they can learn what I have learnt.

I began to look out for others. I understood why the villagers were not coming to the club nor for the means of formation because the same thing happened to me. They also have financial problems; in the club, we contribute money to buy the ingredients we need, and at the end, we share the final products amongst all of us- irrespective of whether the person had paid or not because we know some of the women cannot afford it. Aunty Ify will patiently go looking for them in their homes on several occasions, and at first, I

would get annoyed with them because I felt they lacked respect for her. But Aunt Ify told me to be patient and continue looking for them. Seeing her example helped me to calm down and continue looking out for these women. They need to learn that farming is not all there is in this world; that there are other ways of earning money. I want them to have the same hunger for fellowship and being holy that attracted me to Opus Dei. This will also attract them.

Even though I am uneducated, I can be holy. Trying to be holy makes one holy. I ask God to help me to be holy. I saw how the Opus Dei people behave, and I wanted to be like them, helping others around me to live holy lives. If God gives me the grace, I will also like to live a holy life too.

Would you like to belong to Opus Dei?

Yes! I would like it very much because of all these things I told you; their harmonious family relationship, their living a holy life etc. Many of them visit me when they come for their annual course, and I chat with them. I will very much like to be a member of Opus Dei.

Oluchukwu Mgbechi Angela

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