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## A Special Gathering

The central personality of the gathering in the SMX Convention Center on July 29 was the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, on his way back to Rome from Sydney, where he accompanied the Pope for the World Youth Day.

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The Prelate of Opus Dei in the flesh gives a very different impression from the fictional Prelate as described in the Da Vinci Code. The real Prelate speaks about God and

the things of God that ordinary people can and should feel and touch in their everyday work and life. The contrast with fiction is telling and compelling.

The Prelate's visit to Manila comes at a special time, when the Personal Prelature is observing a Marian Year in thanksgiving for the official establishment of Opus Dei as the first Personal Prelature in the Church just over 25 years ago. That official act of the Pope in November 1982 marked the culmination of a long journey that started in 1928. It crowned the foundation of Opus Dei in 1928 with the definitive and permanent official recognition under the new legal framework that Vatican II opened up.

Indeed, among the many accomplishments of Vatican II was the alignment of the organizational structure of the Church with the

demands and realities of the modern world. Old molds were preserved and strengthened, for example dioceses and religious orders. But a few new molds were created as well: One of these is the Personal Prelature, and Opus Dei is the first (and thus far the only) Personal Prelature formally established within the Church.

Personal Prelatures have a special mission taking into account the realities and needs of the modern world. In the case of Opus Dei, its special mission is to get ordinary people to heed the call to be holy mainly through the fulfillment of their ordinary work and their day-to-day duties. For as long as such work and duties are carried out and undertaken with due care, diligence and competence, with love of God and concern for others, they can be offered up to God. They can help frame a pathway to heaven for

ordinary people who remain in the middle of the world in pursuit of their professional occupation and other ordinary obligations.

Precisely because of their involvement in a secular occupation, ordinary people can reach out to their friends and peers, who can also come closer to God. The friendship and the trust they earn from their friends and peers give them a natural avenue into the minds and hearts of others, who can also put God in the center of their life and work.

Bishop Echevarría, the current Prelate, carries a heavy burden on his shoulders. He follows after two saintly predecessors. The first Prelate of Opus Dei was Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, whose process for eventual beatification has taken a long stride after the initial phase was officially completed in Rome on June 26, 2008.

The Founder of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría Escrivá, was beatified in 1992 and canonized in 2002, with Pope John Paul II referring to him as the "Saint for Ordinary People." Bishop Echevarría carries the burden very well: One quick look at him confirms this.

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Bulletin

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