

What about the myths about Opus Dei?

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The following list of myths and facts about Opus Dei is adapted from a short article published by The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, Opus Dei: Fact and Fiction.

Myth: Opus Dei has a political agenda.

Fact: The only thing Opus Dei has to say about politics is what the Church

says, and many of the Church's social teachings leave room for different opinions on concrete political questions. In these opinionable matters, Opus Dei members make their own decisions just like other faithful Catholics. Politics – whether civil or ecclesial – is simply not Opus Dei's institutional focus. Opus Dei's focus is on providing spiritual guidance to help people deepen their faith and integrate it with their daily life.

Myth: Opus Dei is a secret society.

Fact: The Opus Dei Prelature publishes the names of all its priests and all its international and regional directors. Like dioceses and parishes, it does not publish lay members' names. Neither do health clubs, and people deserve as much privacy in their spiritual affairs as they do in medical matters. Members, however, are more than happy to tell their

family and acquaintances of their membership.

Myth: Opus Dei brainwashes, coerces, or pressures members and potential members.

Fact: Opus Dei respects people's freedom. The Pope and bishops around the world would not support an institution that did not. In an era of relativism, however, some people will call teaching the faith "brainwashing," giving spiritual guidance "coercion," and being a Christian witness "recruiting" or "proselytism." The reality is that Opus Dei is doing nothing more than trying to help people grow in their faith and practice it in their daily life.

Myth: Opus Dei makes its members practice dangerous corporal mortifications.

Fact: Each Lent, the Church reminds people that sacrifice is part of the

spiritual life. To help its members follow this teaching, Opus Dei encourages them to make small sacrifices, such as persevering in their work or listening to those in need. The Catholic tradition also includes other penances, such as fasting and the use of a cilice or discipline, as means for deepening one's union with Christ. As in other Church institutions, some celibate members of Opus Dei follow these customs, subject to the advice of their spiritual director. These customs are not harmful to their health, and are completely unlike *The Da Vinci Code*'s exaggerated and distorted representation. These kinds of sacrifices are not a focus in Opus Dei, which emphasizes integrating faith with the activities of everyday life.

Myth: Opus Dei's status as a “personal prelature” cuts it loose from oversight by the bishops.

Fact: Like a diocese, a personal prelature is overseen by the Holy See. Additionally, Opus Dei receives permission from local bishops before starting apostolic work in their dioceses and keeps diocesan bishops informed about its activities. The guidance it offers its members pertains only to matters connected with its mission, which is educating people about the universal call to holiness and helping them fulfill this call in their daily life. The members of the Prelature remain members of their diocese and are subject to their local bishop just like other Catholics.

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