

# **Some clarifications on a second article published in the “Financial Times”**

Clarifications on a second article published in the “Financial Times” regarding the formation for young people and some changes over time.

07/31/2024

***Rome, 31 July 2024.*** The *Financial Times* has published a report in which some former members of Opus Dei expressed negative

opinions regarding the spiritual formation of young people in activities related to Opus Dei. In response to these testimonies, we wish to say that we are always saddened to hear of concerns voiced by former members and continue to listen and learn from these individuals' experiences. Over the past years, we have drawn up safeguarding procedures and processes in accordance with Church practices and growing social awareness of this topic, so that our work with young people is always carried out in a clear context of freedom and self-realisation.

**In this regard, we wholly reject the claim that there is manipulative recruitment of minors.** This is shown by the fact that more and more, most of the young people who decide that this is not their vocation

after all, remain in contact with the Work and with our formative activities afterwards.

At the same time, while the FT article includes some considerations that the Prelature made when consulted, we would like to make some additional clarifications:

## **Formation for young people**

Opus Dei has long offered spiritual formation activities for teenagers to inspire them to practise Christian virtues, to help them become women and men of integrity, who contribute to society by living out the Christian message in their daily lives. These activities include weekly classes, prayer times and moments of personal reflection. They take place with parental involvement and approval, and are designed to encourage young people to learn and practise their faith, serve other

people, be good friends, prepare to be good professionals and citizens in the future and to care for their family.

Among the young people who attend these activities, a few go on to decide their vocation lies within Opus Dei in apostolic celibacy, while the majority discover their vocation to marriage, and some of them to the priesthood or to religious life in other Catholic institutions instead. We seek to educate and empower young people so that they choose their own paths and we desire to be wholly transparent as to the alternative vocations open to them.

As seen from the soon-to-be-celebrated canonization of Carlo Acutis by Pope Francis, seeking to acquire a deep faith from a very young age is not new. The Catholic Church has canonised people who discovered and followed their

vocation from a very early age - such as St Therese of Lisieux, Sts Francisco and Jacinta of Fatima and many others. There is also a young man from Manchester named Pedro Ballester, who started his vocational discernment in Opus Dei aged 16 and died at age 21 in 2018, who is now being considered for beatification by the Diocese of Salford.

## **Junior candidates**

According to Opus Dei's Statutes, approved by the Catholic Church in 1982, the minimum age for making a formal commitment is 18, after at least one and a half years of preparation and discernment. This is the age of majority for the Catholic Church (Code of Canon Law, nn. 97 and 98). Younger people who feel a call to discern a vocation to Opus Dei can be "junior candidates" if they are over 14 and a half years old but, crucially, only provided that they

have express parental consent. Again we are wholly transparent about these requirements here.

**Junior candidates are clearly told they are not members of Opus Dei.**

These young people receive the spiritual and pastoral help of Opus Dei, adapted to their age, so that they can practise their Christian faith consistently. Once they are old enough they can ask to join the Work if they feel this is their vocation.

After that, joining Opus Dei requires several steps at which the person needs to express their wish to go ahead and affirm that it is their free decision. We totally reject the claim that there is pressure to recruit minors. Enquiries about faith and vocation must come from the junior candidates themselves and not through any coercion, which would be abhorrent and wholly contrary to our guidelines . If mistakes are made, we want to hear about them so that

we can take the necessary steps to correct them.

## **Changes over time**

These guidelines have been developed over the years following changes in society across each country and changes in the Church. It is true that we have learned from mistakes made in the past and, to that end, we are making a concerted effort to improve the transparency and clarity around the discernment process and the status of membership. We also received feedback that our communication and collaboration with the parents needed enhancement and that more flexible formation plans needed to be put in place to attend to individual needs. We listened, learned and are trying to continuously implement improvements.

We are ensuring that junior candidates are sufficiently mature to make decisions as to their vocation through informed consent.

Nonetheless, we are clear that parents have the primary responsibility for the education of their teenage offspring. We recognise and respect the difference of ability between minors and adults to responsibly choose their preferred vocation and life path. Any suggestion otherwise would be wrong.

We are committed to improving the way we implement changes, the way we make sure everyone is aware of them, and the way we monitor them across the world. We require youth centers to have safe environment protocols and follow them up in all of their activities in every region, and we will ensure that they remain fit for purpose and are consistently upheld. We are an institution that

vows to inspire people, both young and old, to lead positive lives for the greater good. We aim to live by the high standards we set ourselves and to act in the event that these standards fall short.

So we reiterate, we are saddened to read of these individuals' negative experiences and invite anyone with concerns of past alleged misconduct to make contact via our safeguarding office. Any allegations are taken seriously and followed up worldwide to ensure that personal conduct adheres to the culture and standards expected of Opus Dei both at this time and in the future. We're open to listening to everything that helps us to better fulfil our mission in the Church and to resolving conflict where it exists.

# Additional information

- **Referring to an earlier Financial Times Magazine report quoted in the article:** *here we share the link* to the Opus Dei Information Office's response to the article.
- **Some guidelines<sup>[1]</sup> that the Prelature has developed to avoid any kind of coercion in the process of vocational discernment:**
- In the Statutes, n. 23 (about incorporation) talks about “the free and explicit will of the person concerned”.
- In recent pastoral letters from the Prelate, one was devoted to freedom (January 2018), where it says “Acting freely, without any sort of coercion, is proper to human dignity and, even more so, to the dignity of the daughters and sons of God” (n. 5);

another refers to the way the vocation to the Work is lived (*October 2020*), where it says “God always wants our freedom to have a decisive role in the response and, therefore, in the very configuration of the vocation – together with grace, which does not take away our freedom but perfects it. It is a freedom that, during the prior stage of discernment, also counts on the light shed by the advice of those who can and should give it” (n. 2).

This reinforces ideas that previous prelates insisted upon: for example, “Identification with Jesus Christ requires free human cooperation: ‘God who created you without you, will not save you without you’. This personal response plays an indispensable role, but where the human creature cannot reach, God’s grace can. The Lord has left us with freedom, which is a very great good and the source of many evils, but it is

also the source of holiness and love. The source of love: only free beings are in a position to love and be happy. Only with difficulty does love grow where coercion rules. And there is no fidelity without the free and firm decision of identifying oneself with the Will of God" (*October 2011*).

- In guidelines about best practices used by directors and those giving formation in Opus Dei at the local level:
- “There is personal discernment, which each person carries out with regard to their own vocation. This is fundamental, for if the person concerned does not consider one’s own vocation, it is of no use, so to speak, what others ‘discern’. Anyone who claims to know with certainty from the outside what a person’s vocation is, would be overstepping their role. Moreover, the answer is

only fully personal when it springs from the depths of the soul and freely embraces the whole of one's life".

- “All aspects of formation in St Raphael centres are concerned with forming free people who know how to love and commit themselves out of love, so that when they discover their vocation, they can respond to God with generosity and total freedom. Some come to discover their call to the Work. Others decide later on to become co-operators, and others realise that their path within the Church is different, and follow it, with gratitude for the help, friendship and formation they have received in the centre they have attended”.
- “It is also good practice for young people who have already reached the age of eighteen to discuss with their parents their intention to apply for

admission ... This is also a way of reinforcing the decision and the maturity of those concerned, who show by their actions that they are capable, even while young, of making free, thoughtful decisions and of acting responsibly”.

- In protocols: *the universal guidelines from the Prelate* state that “The following objectives and principles inform every standard and procedure aimed at preventing and combating abuses against minors and vulnerable persons in activities under the auspices of the Prelature: (...) to promote awareness of and respect for the rights and needs of minors and vulnerable persons and to provide suitable training in safeguarding them; to prevent any form of violence, physical or psychological abuse, negligence, neglect, ill-treatment, or exploitation”.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Guidelines are indications and orientations present in documents of various kinds (canon law, pastoral letters, formation guidance, protocols, etc.).

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