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Q&A about the Financial Times article

Some questions and answers
from the Opus Dei Information
Office about an article
published in the Financial
Times magazine.

26/03/2024

*Q 1. What is Opus Dei's response to
the article?*

A. The Opus Dei prelature always
respects people who raise
complaints. Our main concern is to

listen and establish channels for dialogue, so we can understand each individual's experience clearly.

To do this, Opus Dei has set up healing and resolution protocols in places where there are people who need to express their complaints. This system has been in place for a year in some countries, and is now applied everywhere. Through it, we want to learn about any negative experiences people may have had, apologise and ask them for forgiveness, and put right any harm that may have been caused. This system has been very positive for some of the women who made complaints a few years ago: we were able to resolve individual conflicts and rebuild our relationship with them.

People who have a complaint that they wish to resolve in this way can do so [through the Opus Dei website](#)

in each country, where they will find a contact address and other information.

Q 2. Does this readiness to listen imply that Opus Dei accepts all the accusations?

A. This process of listening and healing doesn't mean that Opus Dei accepts all the accusations made in the media. There are some accusations that we know are unjust, and categorically reject. In Opus Dei there has never been ill-informed or forced recruitment, or people reduced to servitude.

Q 3. Apart from those specific accusations, does Opus Dei admit making mistakes?

A. We recognise that people making complaints can have suffered negative personal experiences. These may have been lack of emotional support, errors in the process of

discernment, out-of-date working practices, failures to distinguish clearly between work and vocation, lack of opportunities for professional development, or failure to accompany them after they left Opus Dei.

While such bad experiences are not widespread, and most of them refer to events that happened decades ago, it is clear that these women have suffered, and also that the directors in Opus Dei have not always listened perceptively and at the right time, especially when some of them most needed support. In those cases, Opus Dei will not tire of asking for their forgiveness or of trying to help each individual in whatever way she needs. Opus Dei is an organisation that seeks to do good, and nothing could be further from our spirit than causing suffering to people who have belonged to the Opus Dei family.

Q 4. *How old does someone have to be, to join Opus Dei?*

A. People can only join Opus Dei when they reach the age of majority. The statutes of the Opus Dei prelateure make this perfectly clear. Nobody under the age of 18 can join it.

Q 5. The *Financial Times* article talks about the vocation of “assistant numerary”. What is that?

A. Assistant numeraries are women in Opus Dei who, like all the other members, aim to sanctify their work and daily life. In their case, their work is caring for the people and centres in the family setting of Opus Dei. Currently, around 4,000 women around the world have chosen this vocation within the Catholic Church, and live it out with love and commitment.

People who would like to know more about the life of an assistant numerary can take a look at [this article](#) written by an assistant numerary on the official website.

Q 6. Do assistant numeraries get paid for their work?

A. Yes, they do. Most members of Opus Dei have jobs that are not connected with Opus Dei, such as teachers, doctors, lawyers, artists, carpenters, and so on. A few work in organisational jobs connected with Opus Dei, or in the houses where some Opus Dei members live. For assistant numeraries, the call to sanctify their ordinary work takes definite shape in their choice of the profession of caring for the people and activities linked to the Opus Dei prelature. And that is a paid job like any other.

Q 7. Some assistant numeraries have said that in the past they weren't paid for their work. Is that possible?

A. The assistant numeraries' work is salaried. They may be employed by the association that owns the centres where they work or by others, or be self-employed, or have other kinds of setup, in accordance with the laws of the countries where they live and their personal situations. Currently they are mostly paid by bank transfer, and they use their income to cover, among other things, their living expenses and to contribute to their home like anyone else.

Being an assistant numerary is a vocation within the Catholic Church. A spiritual vocation is a way of life. In the past – and this was a mistake – this led to a blurring of the lines between things that belonged to the sphere of work, and what belonged to the sphere of vocation. You could

think in terms of a more familiar example: a priest has a vocation, and is paid a salary for a set number of hours of work, but he continues being a priest 24 hours a day, and is always available to accompany his community, or parishioners, because that is his free choice in life. That mind-set of a vocational life in the Church led in the past to a family-style approach to doing things, and there was little awareness of the boundaries between the different spheres.

It was a learning experience for the Church as a whole, and for Opus Dei in particular. With the passage of time it became clear that people needed to have their jobs clearly defined, and not just subsumed into their vocation. From the early 1990s onwards, considerable efforts have been made to change this. The situation today is very different, and there are thousands of assistant

numeraries around the world who can bear witness to that.

Beyond that, in cases in the past where there may have been irregularities in social security contributions, or bad experiences within the organisation, Opus Dei recognises that these things can have happened, but needs the people concerned to make a formal complaint. In Rome a system has been established for people who used to be members to present complaints or claims, and all the countries have been instructed to set up a complaints office to attend to each case and make a specific response to individual situations. This mechanism has helped some women to resolve their complaints, and friendly relations with them have been restored.

Q 8. Do assistant numeraries have to hand in their earnings to Opus Dei?

A. Each assistant numerary is paid, normally by bank transfer, and she has control over what she does with her salary, using it to cover her personal expenses and living expenses.

It's important to be clear about this last point. Numeraries and assistant numeraries often live in shared houses. Those houses are run with the contributions of the people living in them. From the director of a multinational to a teacher, a doctor, a nurse, a designer, or a cook, all of them contribute according to their possibilities to the running and upkeep of the house where they live. So the house functions like a family, or a closely-knit community, where everyone has the same facilities even though their contributions differ. Decades ago it was a widespread practice for salaries to be paid into a common bank account, like a family

account from which all expenses were paid.

Q 9. What is the discernment process for joining Opus Dei? Is it possible that some members may not have been fully informed about their vocation?

A. People ask to join Opus Dei of their own free will, and they can only join after reaching the age of eighteen. As with every vocation in the Catholic Church, there is a long process of admission and discernment, in order to ensure that only people who freely want to join can do so. The first step is to ask to join. Then, for at least six months, the person receives formation and personal accompaniment to give them an in-depth understanding of the commitment they are preparing to make. That is followed by a further year, at least, of formation and discernment. Once they have

become temporary members, for at least another five years they have to confirm annually their desire to continue forward. So the person has to reaffirm their desire to join Opus Dei not just once or twice or three times, but at least eight times over a minimum of six and a half years.

Q 10. Some former assistant numeraries have said that years ago they followed a different lifestyle from other Opus Dei members. Is that true?

A. The Opus Dei prelature is aware that in the past, in some countries, distinctions were made. Accordingly, clear directives have been given to the different regions for many years now, about being proactive in avoiding any kind of disparity in the way Opus Dei members speak to each other, in their lifestyles, and in material aspects.

Q 11. Others have said that when they left Opus Dei, there were people who

tried to convince them that they shouldn't. Could that have happened?

A. Opus Dei exists to help people grow spiritually and personally, so any form of pressure is alien to its spirit. When someone says they do not want to continue in Opus Dei, it is usually the outcome of a process that has been accompanied and respected.

Possibly, in some cases, someone wanted to help, or to support them in the vocational commitment they had formerly lived out fully and happily, but may have lacked empathy or understanding of the process they had gone through. Even expressions arising out of genuine concern for these people, may have been understood very differently by them at the time, or when they recalled them afterwards.

In every case, if these people have been through negative experiences,

Opus Dei wants to listen to them, which is why we've set up a formal process of listening and resolution for people who have belonged to Opus Dei.

Q 12. The article mentions that other former Opus Dei members who were not assistant numeraries, have criticised it on certain websites. What is Opus Dei's position towards this?

A. Everyone's experiences are valid, and if some people have felt wounded while they were in Opus Dei, we will sincerely ask them for forgiveness as often as necessary. Opus Dei is an organisation of people who want to do good, but it is not exempt from making mistakes. When we do make mistakes and hurt another person, even though it wasn't intentional, we will always be ready to apologise and do what we can to make up for it.

As with any organisation, while there may have been some bad experiences, there are also tens of thousands of members who love being in Opus Dei, and hundreds of thousands more who take part in the Christian formational activities we offer. There are also thousands of former members (numeraries, assistant numeraries, associates and supernumeraries) who are happy with Opus Dei and continue coming to the activities it organises.

That is not to diminish the importance of people's experiences, and it doesn't mean Opus Dei can't make mistakes. We would like to be close to everyone who has ever been a member of our family, but that isn't always possible. That is why we have set up a pathway for listening and dealing with the claims or complaints of former members, so that things can be put right whenever possible.

Q 13. What happens when someone leaves Opus Dei?

A. When someone leaves Opus Dei and their job was in some way connected to it, as may be the case of a numerary or an assistant numerary, efforts are made to ensure that they leave with realistic job prospects for the new stage of their life, and that they have what they need, both in terms of money and personal accompaniment, throughout the process. Opus Dei's central government has given some very clear guidelines in this respect, both in general and for specific cases.

Q 14. What are catering colleges or hospitality training centres?

A. They are socio-educational projects aiming to work in particularly vulnerable sectors of society, to help young women continue their secondary education and at the same time give them skills

training to improve their future employment prospects.

In some countries, or very rural areas, where access to education was not easy, these training centres also offered a residential option, which was much appreciated by families.

The idea was that of a technical college. Students received professional training, following programmes that were specifically approved and financed by the state authorities in each country.

Q 15. In 2021 a group of women made some accusations in the media against the Opus Dei prelature in Argentina. What is Opus Dei's response to those claims?

A. Accusations were made against Opus Dei in different media outlets, about the employment and personal situations of a group of women who had formerly been assistant

numeraries in Opus Dei in Argentina, mainly in the 1970s and 1980s.

Some of the accusations were more serious than others, and Opus Dei's reaction to them varies according to each case.

a) Accusations regarding their working and personal lives, while they were in Opus Dei: Opus Dei responded by opening up channels for listening and dialogue. Some of the women involved used these channels of communication to say that they had been hurt by the ways they had been treated personally, and there had been irregularities in their social security contributions. Opus Dei apologised to them sincerely and asked for their forgiveness, and applied remedial measures as appropriate. Today our relationship with those women is positive.

b) Accusations made in the media by some of the women and their representatives, of recruitment and servitude: These accusations are totally false. They give a deceptive version of events, taking things out of context, and mixing up the not-for-profit socio-educational ICES training centre, which was duly approved and inspected by all the competent state authorities in Argentina for over 40 years, with the work done by these women during their time in Opus Dei. The truth is that ICES provided hundreds of girls from all over Argentina with an opportunity for education and job training. Information about the schemes of study, official inspections, testimonies of past students, and photos of the facilities at ICES, together with published reports, can be found on the website <https://www.infoycontexto.com/en>.

Q 16. What are the “corporate works” referred to in the article?

A. Corporate works of apostolate are projects which are set up and run by Opus Dei members, often with other people who are not in Opus Dei, in which the Opus Dei prelature only takes responsibility for the Christian orientation and formational activities.

Corporate works include schools, universities, centres for the advancement of women, medical clinics in deprived areas, farm schools, training colleges, student halls of residence, cultural centres, and more.

Q 17. How can people tell that Opus Dei is behind the Christian formation imparted in those corporate works?

A. The websites of each of the corporate works explain their connection with Opus Dei. It is

something that is totally transparent and actively publicised.

Q 18. People have criticized the fact that corporate works do not include “Opus Dei” in their names. Why is that?

A. The name or title of the corporate works is decided by the people who create them. It isn't Opus Dei's responsibility. The Opus Dei prelature is solely concerned with their Christian orientation and formation.

What's more, the name of any charitable or social project anywhere in the world, whether or not it is inspired by the Church, usually reflects its area of interest, location, aim or main value. That doesn't mean such projects are concealing anything. And as stated above, the connection of the corporate works with Opus Dei is clearly stated on their websites.

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