

Opus Dei, Personal Prelature

From a legal standpoint, Opus Dei is a personal prelature of the Catholic Church. Prelatures are entrusted with undertaking certain pastoral activities.

10/15/2016

In the legal framework of the Catholic Church, the juridical entity known as a personal prelature was established by the Second Vatican Council. The conciliar decree "Presbyterorum ordinis" (7-XII-1965), n. 10, stated that, for a "better

distribution of priests" and the realization of "such particular pastoral works as are necessary in any region or nation anywhere on earth," in the future, among other institutions, "personal dioceses or prelatures" could be established.

Personal Prelatures

The Council aimed to outline a new juridical entity characterized by flexibility, capable of contributing to the effective dissemination of the Christian message and way of life. The Church's organization responded to the demands of its mission, embedded in the history of humanity.

Personal prelatures are regulated by canons 294-297 of the Code of Canon Law. They are entities erected by the Holy See to carry out pastoral or missionary work in communion with diocesan bishops. Governed by a prelate, they conduct their pastoral

work through the organic collaboration of their own clergy and laypeople, both men and women, who adhere to them through agreements while still belonging to the local churches or dioceses where they reside.

Canon Law stipulates that each personal prelature is governed by the general law of the Church and its own statutes.

The Prelature of Opus Dei

Before being established as a Prelature, Opus Dei was already an organic unit composed of laypeople and priests cooperating in an international pastoral and apostolic mission. This specific Christian mission involves spreading the ideal of holiness in the midst of the world, in professional work, and in the ordinary circumstances of life.

Pope Paul VI and subsequent Roman Pontiffs determined that the possibility of giving Opus Dei a juridical configuration suitable to its nature should be studied. In light of conciliar documents, the most appropriate configuration seemed to be that of a personal prelature.

In 1979, the process to achieve this adaptation began, involving both the Holy See and Opus Dei. These efforts concluded in 1981. Subsequently, the Holy See sent a report to the more than two thousand bishops of the dioceses where Opus Dei was present, inviting them to provide their observations.

After evaluating all responses, John Paul II erected Opus Dei as a personal prelature with international scope, through the apostolic constitution "Ut sit" on November 28, 1982, which was implemented on March 19, 1983,

following the approval of the new Code of Canon Law of 1983. With this document, the Roman Pontiff promulgated the statutes, which are the particular pontifical law of the Prelature of Opus Dei. The Work had presented a draft, the result of several years of work based on the previous Constitutions, with contributions from thousands of members of the Work and the final review and approval of St. Josemaría in 1974. These Statutes, with the necessary changes to adapt them to the new legislation, are those embraced by the Holy See. In July 2022 and August 2023, Pope Francis issued two *motu proprio* documents that modified some rules of the apostolic constitution "Ut sit" and articles of the Code of Canon Law related to personal prelatures. Currently, the Statutes are being studied with the Holy See in order to adjust them to these reforms.

Relationship with Dioceses

The Statutes of Opus Dei (Title IV, Chapter V) establish criteria for harmonious coordination between the prelature and the dioceses or eparchies where the prelature carries out its specific mission. Some features of this relationship include:

a) The official and stable apostolic work of Opus Dei does not begin, and the canonical erection of a prelature center does not proceed, without the prior consent of the diocesan bishop.

b) To establish churches for the prelature, or when existing churches in dioceses are entrusted to the prelature — and, if applicable, parishes — an agreement is stipulated between the diocesan bishop and the prelate or the corresponding regional vicar. In these churches, the general provisions of the diocese regarding

churches led by the secular clergy are observed.

c) Regional authorities of the prelate maintain regular relations with the bishops of the dioceses where the prelate carries out its pastoral and apostolic mission, keeping them informed. They also interact with bishops holding leadership positions in Episcopal Conferences and their respective bodies.

In the Holy See, the Prelature of Opus Dei falls under the Dicastery for the Clergy. The prelate is endowed with the faculties of an Ordinary to govern everything related to the prelate's unique mission:

a) This authority of the prelate pertains to the lay faithful of the prelate only regarding the fulfillment of specific commitments—ascetical, formative, and apostolic—undertaken in the formal

declaration of incorporation into the prelate.

These commitments, by their nature, do not interfere with the authority of the diocesan bishop. Opus Dei laypeople remain faithful to the dioceses in which they reside and, therefore, remain subject to the authority of the diocesan bishop in the same manner and on the same issues as other baptized individuals.

b) According to the provisions of the general law of the Church and the statutes of Opus Dei, deacons and priests incardinated in the prelate belong to the secular clergy and are fully under the authority of the prelate.

They strive to foster fraternal relations with members of the diocesan presbyterate and carefully observe the general discipline of the clergy. They enjoy active and passive

voice in the constitution of the presbyteral council of the diocese.

Likewise, diocesan bishops, with the prior consent of the prelate or, if necessary, his vicar, can entrust priests incardinated in the prelature with ecclesiastical duties or offices (pastors, judges, etc.). These priests are accountable only to the diocesan bishop and fulfill their roles following his directives.

Juridical Norms Governing Opus Dei

a) General Laws

1. Opus Dei, as a personal prelature, is governed by the Code of Canon Law of 1983, containing the basic rules regulating personal prelatures in canons 294-297. In the Holy See, the Prelature falls under the Dicastery for the Clergy.

b) Norms Issued by the Roman Pontiff

1. Opus Dei was erected as a personal prelate of international scope by John Paul II through the Apostolic Constitution "Ut sit" on November 28, 1982. This law was modified on July 14, 2022, by Pope Francis through the motu proprio "Ad charisma tuendum."

2. According to the Code of Canon Law and the Apostolic Constitution "Ut sit," Opus Dei is also governed by its own statutes, called the Code of the Particular Law of Opus Dei, granted by John Paul II with that Apostolic Constitution. These statutes are currently under review with the Holy See.

3. The Prelature of Opus Dei is composed of a prelate, its own clergy, and lay faithful (women and men). The laypeople of the Work depend on the prelate regarding the specific tasks of the prelate. Like all Catholic laypeople, they follow the

indications of the bishop of the diocese to which they belong.

4. Priests incardinated in the prelate are fully dependent on the prelate, who assigns them pastoral duties, performed in each place in communion with the Bishop and with diocesan pastoral work. The prelate is responsible for their financial support.

c) Norms Issued by the Prelate and Exercise of Governing Authority

The prelate can promulgate norms that develop the particular law of the prelate. The bulletin Romana publishes decrees of the prelate, as well as a summary of his ordinary activity, each semester.

en/article/personal-prelature/
(07/12/2025)