

## **"I'm retired... How can I help?"**

After 33 years as a teacher in a school in Bogotá (Colombia), Joaquín entered a new phase of life.

10/27/2022

There is always a last day in professional life. For Joaquín, a teacher at Gimnasio de Los Cerros, a school in the north of Bogotá, Colombia, that day arrived after thirty-three years of teaching: he walked in as an employee and left as a pensioner.

The new phase in Joaquín's life came with many challenges. The first was moving from busy Bogotá, 2,600 meters above sea level, to the warmer and friendlier city of Ibagué, which was better for his wife's health and made it easier to care for his mother, who had been living there for six years.

Ibagué, capital of Tolima, was where he grew up, so the city brought back memories. Instead of hearing a school bell at 8:30 every morning, he started to remember scenes from his childhood while walking the city streets and crave certain dishes, like tamale wraps, lechona rice, cuchuco soup, achira cookies, guava candy and arepuelas, a type of sweet arepa.

Between one walk and another, between one reading time and another, he rediscovered the songs of his province: *bambucos*, *pasillos* and waltzes. One day, returning home, he

ran into the chaplain of the parish of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. After greeting him, Joaquín asked, “Father, how can I help?” In Joaquín’s own words, “I told him that I had been a catechist for Confirmation and First Communion, since I had obtained a degree in Religious and Moral Education from the University of La Sabana. The pastor accepted my offer immediately. A few days later, I was back in the classroom.

“One day I realized that I was doing the same thing that St. Josemaría did in his first years of priesthood, when he prepared dozens of children in the slums of Madrid in the 1930s for their first Holy Communion.

“Another day, which was especially emotional for me, was when 87 scapulars were imposed on the children in the catechetical program, as a sign of protection of the Virgin

Mary and as an encouragement to imitate Jesus' life on earth."

Now, months later, Joaquín is starting to teach a new group of children and youth who will receive the sacraments of Christian initiation at the end of the year. He has also joined another, secondary, project, fundraising to finish the construction of a new parish.

As Pope Francis writes, God calls us so that we may become "what the Lord wished to dream and create [...] Your life ought to be a prophetic stimulus to others and leave a mark on this world, the unique mark that only you can leave" (*Christus vivit*, 162).

For Joaquín, retirement was a time to rediscover his vocation as a teacher, because there is no "last day" for sharing the faith.

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(01/17/2026)