THIRD ELECTIVE CONGRESS
OF THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE

PRESS DOSSIER

1. Press Release on the election of the prelate

2. Some information on Opus Dei
   2.1 Description historical summary
   2.2 Current data
   2.3 Some recent educational and social service projects

3. The elective congress
   3.1 An interview with the auxiliary vicar
   3.2 The election and nomination of the prelate
   3.3 How the elective congress works
   3.4 Role of the prelate

4. Other resources
   4.1 Photos
   4.2 Videos
   4.3 Contact persons
   4.4 Subscribe to receive updates by email
1. Press Release on the election of the prelate

Election of next prelate of Opus Dei to begin on January 21

Rome, January 16, 2017. The process planned for the election and appointment of the prelate of Opus Dei will begin in Rome on January 21. Once he has been confirmed by the Pope, the new prelate will become the third successor of Saint Josemaría Escrivá (1902-1975), and will take over the position held by Bishop Javier Echevarría, who died in Rome on December 12.

The auxiliary vicar of the prelature, Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, stated: “We are living this period in an attitude of prayer, going especially to the Holy Spirit.”

He added: “We live these days very close to the Holy Father Francis and the whole Church, of which Opus Dei is a small part. Of course, we feel a strong sense of gratitude for the pastoral work and the good example given by Bishop Javier Echevarría.”

Only a priest can be elected as the prelate. He must be at least forty years old and a member of the Congress of electors, and incorporated in the prelature for at least ten years and a priest for five years. There are currently 94 priests, from 45 countries, who meet these requirements.

Among them are numerous regional vicars (representatives of the prelate in each country or circumscription) as well as other priests who work or have worked in the pastoral work of Opus Dei in Rome or in the 49 circumscriptions of which the prelature is currently composed.

The statutes of the prelature describe the various human, spiritual and juridical qualities the prelate must possess to ensure that this responsibility is carried out suitably. In summary, he has to stand out for the way he lives the virtues of charity and prudence, for his life of piety, love for the Church and her Magisterium, and fidelity to the spirit of Opus Dei. He also needs to possess a deep culture, both in ecclesiastical and civil studies, and the requisite gifts for pastoral government.

The electoral process involves both women and men and concludes with the confirmation of the election by the Pope.
The electoral process begins with a plenary meeting of the women’s council of the prelature, called the Central Advisory, which will take place starting January 21. The electoral Congress begins on January 23. In total 194 faithful of Opus Dei will participate in the process. They will include both priests and lay people, at least 32 years old, who have been in the prelature for at least nine years. They have been appointed from among the faithful of the prelature in the various countries where Opus Dei is carrying out its pastoral work.

In the Central Advisory, each member submits a list with the name or names of those priests in the electoral Congress seen as best suited for the position of prelate. The members of the Congress, keeping these recommendations in mind, then proceed to the voting process. Once the election has been concluded and the person chosen has accepted, he, in person or through someone else, asks the Holy Father for confirmation, as the Pope is the one who appoints the prelate of Opus Dei.

Once the prelate is elected, the participants in the Congress meet for several days for the selection of the members of the central councils who assist the prelate in the government of the prelature. Finally, the members of the Congress examine the state of the prelature and its apostolic activities around the world. The proposals are studied in plenary sessions, which determine the guidelines for the government of the prelature during the eight-year period until the next ordinary general congress.

Updated information on the various phases of the Congress will be available on the Opus Dei website.
2. Some information on Opus Dei

2.1. Description historical summary

Opus Dei is a pastoral institution of the Catholic Church, founded in Madrid on 2 October 1928 by Josemaría Escrivá. In 1983, Pope John Paul II established it as a personal prelature, a pastoral structure foreseen by the Second Vatican Council.

Its aim is to help the Church’s mission of evangelization, fostering among Christians the aim of a life lived in conformity with their faith, and in their ordinary circumstances, especially through the sanctification of their daily work. To sanctify work means to carry it out according to the spirit of Jesus Christ, striving to fulfil one’s duties in the best way possible, so as to give glory to God and be of service to others. In this way, work becomes a place to meet God, and an opportunity to improve and grow personally.

The main activity of the Opus Dei Prelature is that of providing Christian formation, offering spiritual support to its members and to anyone else who wishes it, so that each person in their respective place in society and in the Church, can promote the ideal of the universal call to holiness. The faithful of the prelature, at a personal level and when working with other citizens, strive to help resolve the problems of all sectors of the society they live in, doing so with a Christian spirit.

Opus Dei’s message reminds people, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, that “all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love” (Dogmatic Constitution, Lumen Gentium, no. 40), and this “in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life … There they are called by God that … they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven. Thus especially by the witness of their life, they must manifest Christ to others” (Dogmatic Constitution, Lumen Gentium, no. 31).

A more detailed description is available at this link.
Historical Overview

1928. While on a spiritual retreat in Madrid, on 2 October, Josemaría Escrivá founds Opus Dei under divine inspiration.

1930. 14 February: The apostolic work with women begins.

1933. The first centre of Opus Dei opens in Madrid: the DYA Academy, mainly for students, where classes in law and architecture are given.

1934. DYA becomes a residence for college students. From that base Josemaría Escrivá and the first members offer Christian formation, and spread the message of Opus Dei among young people. An important aspect of this work is the teaching of the Catholic faith to children, and looking after the poor and sick in the outlying neighbourhoods of Madrid.

1936. During the Spanish Civil War Josemaría Escrivá is forced to hide in various different places of Madrid, and finally he left the city, as a consequence of religious persecution. The circumstances mean a temporary suspension of his plans to expand the apostolic work of Opus Dei to other countries.

1939. Josemaría Escrivá returns to Madrid and restarts the expansion of Opus Dei to other Spanish cities. The start of World War II prevents expansion to other countries.

1941. The bishop of Madrid grants the first diocesan approval of Opus Dei.

1943. 14 February: During Mass, God lets Fr Josemaría see the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, as a means to enable priests to be ordained for Opus Dei.

1944. The bishop of Madrid ordains the first three faithful of Opus Dei to become priests: Álvaro del Portillo, José María Hernández Garnica, and José Luis Múzquiz.

1946. Josemaría Escrivá moves to Rome. In the years that follow, he travels throughout Europe to prepare the beginnings of Opus Dei in several different countries.

1947. The Holy See grants the first pontifical approval.

1950. Pius XII grants the definitive approval to Opus Dei. This approval enables married people to join Opus Dei, and secular clergy to be admitted to the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross.

1952. The General Study of Navarra begins in Pamplona (Spain). It became the University of Navarra in 1960.
1965. Paul VI inaugurates the ELIS Centre, a vocational training centre for young people located in the outskirts of Rome, together with a parish entrusted to Opus Dei by the Holy See.

1969. A special general congress of Opus Dei meets in Rome to study the change of Opus Dei’s legal status in the Church to that of a personal prelature, a juridical structure introduced by the Second Vatican Council and suited to the pastoral characteristics of Opus Dei.

1970-75. The founder of Opus Dei makes long trips through Latin America, Spain and Portugal, where he addresses large groups of people on topics affecting their Christian life. 1975: Josemaría Escrivá dies in Rome on 26 June. Some 60,000 people belong to Opus Dei at this point. On 15 September Álvaro del Portillo is elected to succeed the founder of Opus Dei.

1982-83. John Paul II establishes Opus Dei as a personal prelature, appointing Mgr. Álvaro del Portillo as its prelate. The formal execution of the pontifical document establishing Opus Dei as a personal prelature takes place on 19 March 1983.

1991. John Paul II ordains the Prelate of Opus Dei, Mgr. Álvaro del Portillo as bishop.


2002. 6 October: Canonisation of Josemaría Escrivá in St Peter’s Square in Rome.

2014. 27 September: beatification of Álvaro del Portillo, the first successor of St. Josemaría

2.2. Current data

The prelature is made up of more than 92,600 people (approximately 57% are women and 43% are men), of whom about 2,083 are priests. Apart from the priests of the prelature, some 1,900 priests, incardinated in different dioceses throughout the world belong to the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross.

Dates when Opus Dei began its work in different countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Italy, Great Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>France, Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Mexico, United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Chile, Argentina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Colombia, Venezuela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Guatemala, Peru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Ecuador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Uruguay, Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Brazil, Austria, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Japan, Kenya, El Salvador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Holland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Paraguay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Belgium, Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Bolivia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Congo, Ivory Coast, Honduras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Singapore, Trinidad and Tobago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Cameroon, Dominican Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Macao, New Zealand, Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Hungary, Czech Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Estonia, Slovakia, Lebanon, Panama, Uganda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Croatia, Slovenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Korea, Romania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOW IS OPUS DEI GOVERNED?

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT:

Prelate (appointed by the Pope)

Auxiliary Vicar: Fernando Ocáriz (Paris, 1944)

Vicar General: Mariano Fazio (Buenos Aires, 1960)

Central Secretary Vicar: José Javier Marcos (Palencia, 1961)

Central Advisory (women):
Secretary of the Central Advisory: Isabel Sánchez Serrano (Marcia, 1969)
+ 7 central directors
+ delegates from regions

General Council (men):
+ 7 central directors
+ delegates from regions

Regional Advisory (women)
Regional Commission (men)

REGIONAL GOVERNMENT:

In each one of the 49 regions there is a regional government structure. Some regions are further divided into delegations. It mirrors the central government structure and is made up of:

Vicar General:
Mariano Fazio (Buenos Aires, 1960)

Central Secretary Vicar:
José Javier Marcos (Palencia, 1961)

SOME DATA

92,600
people worldwide form part of Opus Dei.
Approximately 57% women, 43% men.

600,000
Approximate number of cooperators and those taking part in means of Christian formation. Many other people benefit from the work of the prelature through the parishes entrusted to priests of Opus Dei, or through the social and educational initiatives that receive pastoral attention from the prelature.

DISTRIBUTION BY CONTINENT

Europe 57%
America 34%
Asia 4%
Africa 4%
Oceania 1%

SOME IMPORTANT IDEAS

- The message of Opus Dei helps people to seek God in their work, their family life and the ordinary activities of each day.

- St Josemaría founded Opus Dei in 1928. He preached to workers, married men and women, students and priests, that ordinary life was the setting where the majority of Christians should imitate Jesus Christ. The keys to his message are the sanctification of work, prayer and service to others, unity of life and, especially, knowing ourselves to be children of God and of the Church.

MORE INFORMATION

[www.opusdei.org](http://www.opusdei.org)
[www.facebook.com/opusdei.eng](http://www.facebook.com/opusdei.eng)

The bulletin of the Opus Dei prelature (“Romana”) is published twice a year and includes all the official data, appointments, activities of the prelate, etc.

Graphic: Nicolás Sangrador Andreu (@nicosangrador)
2.3. Some recent educational and social service projects

The educational, charitable, and cultural initiatives described below are all promoted by faithful of the prelature and cooperators, along with other people, both Catholic and non-Catholic. Those who undertake and direct these activities – assuming full responsibility for their undertakings, including in its financial aspects – try to respond to the needs of their country or local community, without discriminating on the basis of race, religion or social status.

The prelature of Opus Dei contributes to the development of these social initiatives, providing pastoral assistance and Christian guidance, always in full respect freedom of conscience.

Among the works of corporate apostolate directly promoted by Saint Josemaría are secondary schools, universities, women’s centers, medical dispensaries in underdeveloped areas, schools for farm workers, vocational training institutes, student residences, and cultural centers. His successor, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, also promoted numerous initiatives of this type. In this article, you can watch the documentary “Working for the Others” about some of these works.

Recent activities of this kind include the following examples:

- **Los Pinos Education Center** ([http://www.lospinos.org.uy](http://www.lospinos.org.uy)) active since 1997 in Casavalle, a marginal area of Montevideo, Uruguay, promotes the integral development of children, adolescents and youth through a variety of educational programs. The goal of Los Pinos is to help students grow academically, professionally, humanly and spiritually and thus strengthen their identity, skills, and abilities.

- **Isthmus University** ([http://unis.edu.gt](http://unis.edu.gt)) began in Guatemala in 1997 as a development of an earlier initiative called the Women’s Institute of Higher Education. At present it has six faculties: Economics and Business, Architecture and Design, Law, Communication, Education and Engineering.

- **Braval** ([http://www.braval.org](http://www.braval.org)) and **Terral** ([www.terral.org](http://www.terral.org)) are centers that provide social and educative support in Raval, a neighborhood of Barcelona (Spain) particularly affected by immigration. Through a program of personalized attention by volunteers, the youth are motivated to study and to take a real interest in their own professional development. Enjoying the support of a good number of companies, the centers also help their students to find work and secure a job. A multi-ethnic sports program also facilitates the integration between the different cultures present in the neighborhood.

- **Harambee Africa International** ([http://nuovo.harambee-africa.org](http://nuovo.harambee-africa.org)) was founded in 2002 on the occasion of the canonization of Opus Dei’s founder. It is a charitable organization that promotes educational initiatives in Africa in collaboration with local development aid agencies. It
has supported projects in Kenya, Madagascar, South Africa, Guinea Bissau, Uganda, Angola, Cameroon, Sao Tome, Mozambique, Congo, Nigeria, Benin, Ivory Coast, Togo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso and Sudan, with many different kinds of projects in the areas of education, healthcare, agricultural development, and more.

- **Al Tilal** provides professional training that prepares young women from the inner mountains of Lebanon for the working world. It was launched in 2002 in the vicinity of Byblos and is financed by grants from local and foreign foundations. In Al Tilal, Christian and Muslim students work together in harmony. In recent years, the institution has hosted numerous refugees from Syria.

- **The Laguna Care Center** ([http://www.lagunacuida.org](http://www.lagunacuida.org)) located in the Latina district of Madrid, was launched following the canonization of Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer in 2002. It aims to offer care and support to elderly people afflicted with Alzheimer's as well as to patients who need palliative care, with the aim of improving their quality of life and helping their families. Its services cover the areas of neurology, geriatrics, rehabilitation, advanced pediatric diseases and family assistance, both at home and at the headquarters of Laguna. An extensive network of volunteers collaborates with health professionals who work steadily at the center. Thanks to the financial support of many people and public and private institutions, Laguna is able to help those who lack the resources to receive the care they require and thus contribute to creating a culture of care in which the elderly and the sick feel cared for, attended to, understood and loved until the last moment of their lives.

- **Iwollo Health Clinic** ([http://www.nfh.org.ng/iwollo.htm](http://www.nfh.org.ng/iwollo.htm)) is an extension of Niger Foundation Hospital, Enugu, Nigeria, in Agoubo Iwollo, a rural area that faces serious health problems. It began its activity in 2003. It offers free medical care – including medium-sized surgical interventions – to the entire population of the area, with special attention to women and children. In its own headquarters, the clinic also organizes talks on hygiene and illness prevention to locals.

- **The Xabec Professional Training Center** ([www.xabec.es](http://www.xabec.es)), in Valencia (Spain), began its activity in 2003. It imparts work training in the specialties of Industrial Maintenance, Construction and Civil Works. Its courses are recognized by the regional government of the Valencian Community, and this allows students – mainly immigrants – to obtain official professional qualification. The center offers courses for both individuals and companies, as well as subsidized courses for workers and the unemployed.

- **Université des Lagunes** ([http://www.universite-des-lagunes.org](http://www.universite-des-lagunes.org)), in Abidjan (Ivory Coast), is an initiative of a local association of jurists. The faculty of legal, political and administrative sciences opened its doors in 2010, and in the years following, the institute has added economic and business sciences, as well as mathematics. The faculty of legal sciences offers, in addition to the bachelor’s degree, some masters programs.
3. The elective Congress

3.1. An interview with Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Auxiliary Vicar of Opus Dei

“Trusting in the Holy Spirit’s guidance”

(By Rodrigo Ayude)

On December 22, Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, auxiliary vicar of Opus Dei, publically convoked the Congress that will elect Bishop Javier Echevarría’s successor as head of the Prelature. On January 21, a plenary session of the Council for women in the Prelature will be held in Rome, which will present to the Congress a list of suggestions for candidates. The voting of the elective Congress will begin on January 23.

How are the people in the Prelature of Opus Dei living this period of preparation for the election of the new Prelate. As auxiliary vicar, what are your sentiments during these days?

I think that all of us, both men and women, in the Prelature are trying to foster during this period a spirit of prayer, going especially to the Holy Spirit. In fact, the elective Congress will begin with the votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, to ask for guidance in all our steps. Faith gives us the certainty that our Lord is leading his Church, and therefore also this portion of his people.

Moreover, this time of Christmas will help us prepare our heart for the elective Congress, by directing our eyes to what is essential: to Jesus, the Child-God, the face of the Father’s Mercy. In contemplating the mystery at Bethlehem, we will also find our Lady, Mother of the Church, and we will have recourse to her intercession.

We are living these days closely united to the Holy Father Francis and the whole Church, of which Opus Dei is a small part. Naturally, we also have a great sense of gratitude for the pastoral guidance and good example Bishop Javier Echevarría left us.

Following Saint Josemaría’s footsteps and the witness of his first two successors, we are pondering in our heart on the inheritance we have received, which we need to pass on as light and consolation for today’s world, just as Christ’s disciples have tried to do over the centuries. I am certain that we will unite ourselves wholeheartedly to the Prelate who is elected, to help him guide the Prelature in current-day society.

In the two previous elections, the “number 2” in Opus Dei was chosen as Prelate. In 1975, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, who for many years had been the Founder’s main assistant. Then, with Bishop Del Portillo’s death, the vicar general, Bishop Javier Echevarría, was elected. Do you think this trend might repeat itself in future elections?
It’s true that this was the case in the previous elections. I think this was due to the special situation of the first two successors, who were formed directly by Saint Josemaría. The electors voted in conscience for these persons. It wasn’t an automatic process. It seemed best to them to elect those who had worked most closely with the Founder.

Now circumstances have changed somewhat. The new Prelate won’t be someone who worked so directly with the Founder as Blessed Alvaro del Portillo and Bishop Javier Echevarría did, although they may have known and interacted with him.

In my opinion, the elective Congress has before it many worthy candidates, who have the virtues and prudence needed to take on this responsibility. The electors have the responsibility to vote, in conscience, for the person they consider best suited. The name of the person chosen will be sent right away to Pope Francis, since the confirmation of the Roman Pontiff is required.

When an election takes place, public opinion tends to view things in political terms, speaking often about “currents,” “trends” etc. What is your reaction when things are focused in this way?

These interpretations are far removed from how those who experience this election as a spiritual and ecclesial reality view it. Those who have the responsibility for an election like this place their trust in the “current” of the Holy Spirit, as Pope Francis encouraged us to do a few days ago, when speaking about the immediate future of Opus Dei.

It’s true, as you said, that sometimes partial interpretations are made, from an overly human or political point of view. In placing the accent on these features, variety comes to be viewed as a problem. In my opinion, pluralism and variety are a great treasure. The electors of Opus Dei, like the other faithful in the Prelature, come from countries all over the world, and have quite different ways of being and cultural trends, with tastes and styles typical of their homeland and family. This diversity,
so strongly fostered by Saint Josemaría, is compatible with what is essential: fidelity to the charism received by the Founder and recognized by the Church. Being faithful to this spiritual inheritance (with some clear features such as the sense of divine filiation, the search for sanctity in the ordinary circumstances of each day, a lay mentality and priestly soul, etc.) assures an underlying unity among everyone.

The two previous Prelates worked directly with the Founder. Does the election of the third Prelate open up a new epoch in Opus Dei?

There come to mind some words that Bishop Echevarría often told us: “Opus Dei is in your hands, in the hands of each person in the Work.” This is a reality that now takes on new force. The current circumstances are a call to responsibility, since each of us has to strive more diligently to incarnate the legacy of Saint Josemaría in the world as it is now, for people today.

Certainly, whoever is elected Prelate will be able to rely on the prayer of the faithful of Opus Dei and of so many other people. He will also have the support of the team he assembles, and work alongside others: collegiality is another key feature of Saint Josemaría’s legacy.

What do you see as the main challenges that the new Prelate of Opus Dei will face?

The principal challenge is helping each person in Opus Dei to learn to build up the Church in their own place of work and professional environment, in the world of culture and the family. By their Christian witness, the Prelature’s faithful can help people today to find Christ in “the middle of the street,” in a society that each day is becoming more varied. Thus the need exists to carry out a catechesis that is up to date in the world of the professions, right where people today find themselves.

Another challenge is giving joy and hope to today’s world. Not to an ideal world but to this complex world of ours, riven with wounds and so in need of charity. In other words, sanctifying ordinary life today, bringing Christ to all the existen-

tial peripheries, as Pope Francis reminds us.

With God’s grace, it will be possible to teach people to strive to live with their heart placed in Christ and their feet on the ground, aware of their own limitations. The joy of living the Christian message, embodied in their own life, will be spread among those alongside them: from mechanic to mechanic, from nurse to nurse, from businessman to businessman, from journalist to journalist...

There will also be the need to strengthen the personal initiative of thousands of people who, spurred by love for Christ and other men and women, will be able to begin initiatives that respond to the great challenges of our day and age: fostering professional honor and ethics, the struggle against poverty, help for refugees, the fight against unemployment, strengthening the family, etc. In summary, hopefully we can contribute to building up the Church as the “world reconciled with God,” as Saint Augustine said.
3.2. The election and nomination of the prelate of Opus Dei

This text explains the process whereby the prelate is elected and then nominated, as detailed in the “Statutes” of the Opus Dei Prelature.

As foreseen by law, when the office of prelate becomes vacant, government rests with the auxiliary vicar, who within a month has to convocate a general elective congress so that a new prelate can be designated within three months since the office became vacant (cf. Statutes, 149 §§1-2).

The faithful of Opus Dei taking part in the elective congress are priests and lay people at least 32 years old who have been incorporated in the prelature for at least nine years. They are nominated from among the faithful of the countries in which Opus Dei carries out its pastoral work (cf. Statutes, 130 §2). The statutes do not specify a maximum number of attendees at the congress. On the last occasions, the total was close to 100.

Only a priest may be elected as prelate. He must be at least forty years old, a member of the congress, incorporated in the prelature for at least ten years, and a priest for five years (cf. Statutes, 131, 1ª).

The statutes of the prelature describe the various human, spiritual and juridical qualities the prelate must possess in order to ensure that this office is carried out as it should be. In summary, he has to stand out for the way he practises the virtues of charity and prudence, for his life of piety, love for the Church and her Magisterium, and fidelity to the spirit of Opus Dei. He also needs to possess a deep culture, both in ecclesiastical and civil studies, as well as the requisite gifts for pastoral government (cf. Statutes, 131, 2ª y 3ª). These qualities are similar to those required by canon law for candidates to become bishops (cf. Code of Canon Law, c. 378, §1).

The process used to select the new prelate follows that indicated in the current Code of Canon Law for canonical elections for ecclesiastical institutions (cf. canons 64-179; cf. also the Apostolic Constitution Ut sit, art. IV). In accordance with general legal principles, the statutes of the Opus Dei prelature further specify some aspects, such as the requirement that the election must be confirmed by the Pope (Cf. Code of Canon Law, 178-179; Ut sit, IV; Statutes 130, §1) on account of the type of jurisdictional structure which the prelature has within the hierarchical organisation of the Church.

The election process begins with a plenary meeting of the women’s council of the prelature, called the Central Advisory (cf. Statutes, 146, §2). Each person freely proposes a list with the name or names of the priests they see as best suited for the office of prelate. These are then passed on to the elective congress (cf. Statutes, 130, §3), whose members, bearing the suggestions of the Central Advisory in mind, then proceed to the voting process. Only those present can vote; the use of delegates is not allowed (cf. Statutes, 130, §1).
Once the election has been concluded, and the person chosen has accepted, he, in person or through someone else, must ask the Pope for confirmation (cf. Statutes, 130, §4). Once the election is confirmed by the Pope, the person becomes prelate and acquires his full powers (cf. Statutes, 130, §1).

While the office of prelate is vacant, those in positions of government, either in general government or in the territorial jurisdictions of Opus Dei, continue in office. Once the new prelate has been nominated by the Pope, they can be renewed or substituted in these responsibilities (cf. Statutes, 149, §3). Since the prelature has a jurisdictional and hierarchical structure, the organs of government are considered canonically as vicars or cooperators of the prelate, who is the centre and source of unity of the prelature (cf. Statutes, 125, §1).

The prelate’s power is exercised in accordance with the general law of the Church and the specific one of the prelature, namely the Apostolic Constitution Ut sit, and the “Codex iuris particularis Operis Dei” or Statutes promulgated by the Pope (c. 295 §1), where the various juridical and pastoral responsibilities are regulated in detail. As is stated in the Statutes, the prelate has to be master and father for the faithful of Opus Dei, who truly loves everyone in the depths of Christ, and who forms and sets them alight with burning charity, spending his life most willingly for them (cf. Statutes, 132, §3).

Canon 295 of the Code of Canon Law, and article IV of the Apostolic Constitution Ut sit, specify that the prelate governs Opus Dei as its proper ordinary and pastor, with a jurisdiction which allows him to carry out the pastoral mission which the Church entrusts to the prelature.

This jurisdiction extends to the priests incardinated in the prelature, and to the lay faithful who dedicate themselves to carrying out the apostolic tasks of Opus Dei (cf. Ut sit, III). It includes the government of its clergy, and the formation and spiritual and apostolic support for the laity incorporated in the prelature, to help them dedicate themselves more intensely to the service of the Church.

Like all other lay faithful, their equals, those of the prelature come under the jurisdiction of the bishop of the diocese in all that is laid down in general for the Christian faithful, and they enjoy the freedom and independence proper to all Catholics with regard to family, professional, cultural, social or political decisions (cf. Statutes, 88, §3).
3.3. How the elective congress works

This text explains the process whereby the prelate is elected in three phases: the plenary meeting of the Central Advisory, the general elective congress, and the nomination by the Pope.

The process begins when the auxiliary vicar of the prelature (if there is one; if not, then the vicar general) convokes the general elective congress on a precise date, within three months since the vacancy occurred, and which involves three phases: the plenary meeting of the Central Advisory; the general elective congress; and the nomination of the prelate by the Pope.

a) Plenary meeting of the Central Advisory

- The full council of the women of the prelature, called the Central Advisory, begins its meeting in Rome with a Mass of the Holy Spirit in the prelatic church of Our Lady of Peace, to place their work under its protection.

- The names of the priests who are best suited for the office of prelate are announced.

- Each member of the Central Advisory places an envelope in an urn with the name or names of those priests whom she considers most suitable for the office of prelate. These proposals are made freely and in secret.

- The urn is then taken to where the general elective congress will take place.

b) General elective congress

- The congress also begins with a Mass of the Holy Spirit.

- The proceedings then begin. The congress secretary reads one by one the names proposed by all the members of the Central Advisory. In this way, the electors vote, while bearing in mind the names suggested by the central governing body of the women of the prelature.

- The person elected must indicate if he accepts or if, in his judgement, serious obstacles exist which would not allow him to accept the office.

c) Nomination by the Pope

- Once the election is over, the person selected asks the Pope, either himself or through someone else, for his confirmation.
- Once the election is confirmed, and the Pope has made the nomination, the elective congress makes public the result of the election and the nomination of the prelate, who begins to carry out his duties.

**General congress**

- Then the members of the congress meet for a few days to decide on the appointment of the members of the General Council, who are nominated by the prelate to help him in governing the prelature. These are the auxiliary vicar (if the prelate has nominated him), the vicar general, the central vicar secretary, at least three assistant secretaries, a delegate for each region of the prelature, a prefect of studies, and a general administrator. Of these, only the vicars have to be priests.

- The general congress of the women follows to decide on the members of the Central Advisory, which has a similar structure to that of the General Council.

- Finally, those attending examine the state of the prelature and its apostolic activities. Proposals are studied in plenary sessions and form the basis of the guidelines for the government of the prelature for a period of eight years until the next ordinary general congress.
HOW IS A NEW PRELATE CHOSEN IN OPUS DEI?

The process starts when the auxiliary vicar of the prelature convokes the general elective Congress, within three months of the post becoming vacant. There are three steps:

1. PLenary Meeting of the Central Advisory
   - The plenary meeting of the council for women of the prelature (Central Advisory) starts in Rome with a Mass of the Holy Spirit.
   - The names of the priests who fulfill the requirements for the role of prelate are read out. Each member of the central advisory places in a box a sealed envelope with the name or names of those priests she considers most suitable for the role of prelate. These proposals are personal and secret.
   - The box is then taken to the place where the general elective Congress is to be held.

2. General Elective Congress
   - Opening of the Congress with a Mass of the Holy Spirit.
   - The secretary of the Congress reads out the proposals from the members of the central advisory one by one. Then the electors vote taking into account the names given by the women's central governing body.
   - The chosen candidate must say whether he accepts or whether, in his opinion, there are grave obstacles preventing him from accepting the role.

3. Appointment by the Holy Father
   - Once the election has taken place, the priest elected asks for confirmation from the Holy Father.
   - After the appointment by the Pope, the elective Congress makes public the election of the prelate, who starts to fulfill his task.

GENERAL CONGRESS
- After the election, the members of the congress meet over several days to choose the general Council, which will help the prelate in governing the prelature.
- This is followed by a general Congress of the women to choose the members of the central Advisory, which has a structure similar to that of the general Council.
- Finally, the congress members examine the state of the prelature and the apostolic activities to determine the direction for the governance of the prelature for the next eight years, until the next ordinary general Congress.
- At a date to be determined, the solemn entrance of the new prelate into the prelatic church of Our Lady of Peace takes place, with the celebration of Holy Mass.

RELEVANT DATES

- 1928 2 OCT
  Foundation of Opus Dei
- 1975 15 SEPT
  First elective Congress. Mgr Alvaro del Portillo is elected first successor
- 1975 26 JUN
  The founder, Josemaría Escrivá, dies
- 1982 28 NOV
  Opus Dei established as a personal prelature
- 1994 20 APR
  Second elective Congress. Mgr Javier Echevarría is nominated prelate
- 1994 23 MAR
  Bishop Alvaro del Portillo dies
- 2016 12 DEC
  Bishop Javier Echevarría dies
- 2016 22 DEC
  Date of elective congress announced
- 2017 23 JAN
  Third elective Congress

PROFILE OF CONGRESS MEMBERS WHO CAN BE ELECTED

94
Total number of priests in the Congress

Total number of countries
45

COUNTRY DISTRIBUTION
- Europe: 46%
- America: 38%
- Asia: 9%
- Africa: 5%
- Oceania: 2%
3.4. Role of the prelate

**The responsibilities of the prelate of Opus Dei**

The prelate is, above all, a pastor and father, a servant of all the faithful of the prelature, at the service of the Church and of the world. He governs the prelature as its proper ordinary and pastor. He is answerable to the Pope though the Congregation for Bishops.

While his jurisdiction is similar to that of a bishop, in his case it is confined to the specific pastoral mission entrusted to the prelature.

In the case of lay people, and of priests incardinated in a diocese, the prelate guides their Christian formation and spiritual support, to help them carry out the vocational commitments which they freely undertook with their incorporation into the prelature (or the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, in the case of diocesan priests): namely, sanctifying their work and family life, growing in virtue without changing where they live and work, helping the work of evangelization of society, etc.

In the case of priests incardinated in the prelature, the prelate has the responsibility of suitably distributing pastoral undertakings among them, of taking care of their ongoing formation, in matters doctrinal, spiritual and pastoral, as well as providing for their upkeep, and their care in illness and old age.

The prelate carries out his pastoral responsibilities by means of advice and encouragement, as well as laws, directives and guidelines.

**The prelate of Opus Dei as “father” of a family**

Those who belong to Opus Dei share the same calling from God to strive for holiness in the ordinary activities of every day. This supernatural vocation creates a strong link which unites all these faithful into a family.

This supernatural family is a reflection of the one made up by the universal Church, where God exercises the fullness of paternity.

In a very natural way, the prelate of Opus Dei has been called “father” from the beginning, because he is the principle and visible foundation of this family unity. For the faithful, he is a master, sanctifier and pastor, who has been given the task of acting in the name and person of Christ. For a similar reason, priests in many countries are also called “father”.

The father in Opus Dei counts on the prayers said by the faithful for him and for his intentions, and he relies on them in order to carry out his mission as pastor, which is none other than uniting them more and more with Christ, and with a multitude of souls who receive Christian formation from the Work.
4. Other resources

4.1. Photos

https://www.flickr.com/opus-dei/

4.2. Videos

- Videos will be uploaded to the YouTube account: https://www.youtube.com/OpusDeiWorld

- To obtain those images in high resolution (TV format) please email international@opusdei.org.

4.3. Contact persons

- Manuel Sánchez: +39 333 47 88 131
- Leticia Sánchez de León: +39 327 46 04 950

Via dei Farnesi 91/A- 00186 ROMA
Tel. (39) 066867522

4.4. Subscribe to receive updates by email

People interested in receiving updates about the congress by email should subscribe to international@opusdei.org