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The Work in Canada : 60 years young

From Montreal in 1957, Opus Dei spread gradually across the country. Its message is being carried from East to West.

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This year we are celebrating the 60th anniversary of the beginning of Opus Dei in Canada. It was on June 7, 1957 that the first members of Opus Dei moved to Canada at the request of Saint Josemaria to start the apostolic work. A few weeks later, Opus Dei's first centre opened its doors on rue

Plantagenet near the Université de Montréal. Fr. John Martin and Fr. Joseph Escribano were among the first to arrive, followed shortly afterwards by Alfonso Bielza, an aeronautical engineer from Spain. The apostolate with women began in Montreal in 1959, with the arrival of Nisa Guzman, Laly Martin, Carmen García Grotta and Marie-Thérèse Santamaria.

From Montreal, the apostolic expansion has spread across Canada. There are now 16 centres in six cities: Montreal (1957), Quebec City (1964), Toronto (1981), Ottawa (1989), Vancouver (1997) and Calgary (2011). Frequent apostolic trips are made to Kingston, Waterloo, Kitchener, London, Edmonton, Victoria, Winnipeg, Charlottetown and Rimouski.

Opus Dei's faithful, cooperators and friends are involved in numerous

educational initiatives for young people, professional men and women, and families. Examples include the Big Picture Seminars to prepare high school students for adult life and parenting courses organized in the Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto and Vancouver areas. There are also summer family camps near Montreal, girls camp in seven locations, and Father and Son Camps near London and Quebec City.

Several residences have been set up to provide university students with a study environment designed to help them excel academically and in their future careers, as well as opportunities for cultural and spiritual development in a home-like atmosphere. Programs for residents and their friends include an introductory course on ethics, professional development seminars, English as a second language programs for summer international

students, guest speakers and study skills workshops. There are residences in Toronto (Kintore College and Ernescliff College), Quebec City (Centre culturel Trimar and Résidence Boisgomin), Ottawa (Résidence universitaire Valrideau and Résidence universitaire Parkhill), Montréal (Centre universitaire Fonteneige and Riverview Study Centre) and Calgary (Bowmont).

Inspired by Saint Josemaria's promotion of Christian social responsibility, faithful of the Prelature and their friends are actively involved in educational activities that provide assistance to the underprivileged while developing a sense of the value of service among the participants. For instance, the Academic and Sports Enrichment (ASE) program, founded in 1994, has helped hundreds of inner-city youth from Regent Park in

Toronto to improve their academic skills and prepare for high school and university. In Quebec City, through monthly visits, young men help at a home of l'Arche, a charity founded by Jean Vanier to care for citizens with various disabilities. Visiting youth prepare meals for the residents and their volunteer care givers.

Over the years, more than 300 university and junior college students have been involved in international development projects in Peru, Kenya, Mexico, and Nicaragua. The El Refuerzo Project has prepared and sent young women to the poorer areas of Peru to give courses in hygiene and nutrition, as well as helping to build medical dispensaries, playgrounds and educational facilities for the local children.

Opus Dei also provides intensive spiritual and doctrinal development opportunities in two conference centres in Canada. Events include retreats, seminars, workshops, humanities courses and family development courses year-round. The Manoir de Beaujeu near Montreal, and Cedarcrest north of Toronto have both undergone extensive renovations or expansion in the last 20 years, including the addition of the Centre de gestion hôtelière Soulanges to house and train hospitality management staff at the Manoir. A third conference centre to be called Copper Ridge, on British Columbia's Pacific coast, is under development.

In 1988, in collaboration with a group of cooperators and their families, Dr. Teresa Tomory, mother and educator, founded Hawthorn School, an independent school for girls from kindergarten to grade 12,

serving the Toronto area. Besides ensuring a strong academic program, it has a unique mentoring and character education program.

In 1989 Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte entrusted the Parish of St. Ambroise in Montreal to priests of the Prelature, and in 1997 Archbishop Adam Exner of Vancouver placed the Catholic chaplaincy of Simon Fraser University in the hands of a priest of Opus Dei. There are currently 16 Canadian priests of the Prelature exercising their pastoral ministry in various apostolates across the country.

As these first 60 years draw to a close, the Work in Canada carries on the generosity and greatness of spirit of its pioneers. We look forward to seeing how God will use our collaboration over the next 60 years and beyond!

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