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“Once I put God first, all the rest falls into place”

Nina Lagdameo, married, 55 years old, talks about integrating a demanding professional career with raising three children.

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Nina Lagdameo, married, 55 years old and originally from the Philippines, has lived in the United States for 31 years. She works at IESE Business School's New York City

campus as Director of Executive Education. She resides in New Jersey with her husband and two sons, aged 17 and 14. Her 18-year old daughter is currently a freshman at the University of Navarra in Pamplona, Spain.

As a parent, what are your main goals in life?

At this stage of my life, my primary goal as a parent is to ensure that my children receive a good education. This includes not only their university education but everything to do with their spiritual, social, and cultural formation. It won't be long before they will be on their own, so I want them to be prepared to face the world as responsible adults.

How long have you attended activities organized by Opus Dei?

I first heard about Opus Dei as a 13-year old in the Philippines. My

mother encouraged me to join a girls' club that had cooking, crafts, and other activities. More importantly the club exposed me to a deeper understanding of the Catholic religion. I didn't take to it immediately, but over time it made sense. I recall that my father once gave me the book, *The Faith Explained* (by Leo Trese), and I abandoned it after reading the first page! Years later, while in college, I read it and could not put it down. I suppose one's appetite for spirituality changes over time.

When I arrived in America in 1986, one of the first calls that I made was to Alderton House, a center of Opus Dei in Manhattan's Upper East Side. I wanted to continue my practice of attending a spiritual retreat every year. These days I go often to Murray Hill Place in Midtown not only for monthly days of recollections and a yearly retreat, but also for

professional development seminars and cultural activities.

How do those activities benefit you?

Opus Dei has helped me to deepen my knowledge of the Catholic faith as well as to develop good work habits and high ideals, all of which helps me be the person God wants me to be. For example, various lecture series – on parenting, educating children in freedom, managing the challenges facing children with social media – have helped me and my husband be better informed and more attentive parents. I have found that attending formation classes several times a month enables me to carry out my work better, whether it be at home or at IESE. The topic one week might be on the importance of little things, and that helps me remember the value of responding to emails thoroughly and paying

attention to details. Or it might be the importance of trying to smile and maintain my cheerfulness and patience when facing my children or a room full of competitive, high level executives expecting prompt and outstanding service on every level.

As a wife, a mother, a professional, a daughter, a sister, a friend – all of these roles that I have are united by the ultimate goal of growing closer to God and serving others because of Him.

Working full time outside my home definitely means I need to have my priorities clear and make the best possible use of my time. Preparing a good meal for my family, baking for friends, traveling, or delivering an Executive Education program at IESE Business School are all important. I learned that all these activities are pleasing to God if I do them for Him and as well as I can. Opus Dei has

taught me to redirect my desire for perfection – to not be a perfectionist, but to strive to work and to care for my family as well as I can, doing everything out of love for God.

What does a normal day in your life look like?

I get up very early as I live in New Jersey and take the train into Manhattan every day. I hate crowded trains so I am in the city in time for the 7:00 a.m. Mass at Holy Innocents church. Some people get up early to do yoga and meditate. I get up early to go to church and meditate in God's presence too! This grounds my day, sets things in perspective, and gives me peace. I find that when you put God first, he multiplies your time.

I then walk from 37th street to 57th street, saying my rosary while enjoying the lights of Times Square without the tourists. I am in the office typically before 9:00 a.m. and

can mail letters, stop at the bank or pick up things from the pharmacy beforehand.

My role at work involves talking to Senior Executives from all parts of the world. Being at the office early enables me to catch executives in Asia or Europe. IESE's main office is in Barcelona so we typically have conference calls first thing in the morning. I may go out to meet a corporate contact for lunch or coffee. Otherwise, I am constantly communicating on the telephone or by email. We eat lunch at 1:00 p.m. at the office and try to sit together whenever we can. It is a nice practice, since otherwise we all would be having lunch in front of the computer. Twice a week I try to sneak in an hour of exercise at NY Health & Racquet club. Before I know it, it is 5:30 p.m. and if I don't have any other appointments, I rush to Penn Station to take the train home.

My husband picks me up at the station if he can, otherwise I walk home. I try and make it for dinner but if I am late, I chat with my family over dessert, prepare lunches for the next day, organize myself, read a little, chat with my husband, say my night prayers and get to bed.

Weekends are different. I usually prepare a big breakfast and we try to have most of our meals together, in addition to attending Mass together at 11:00 a.m. on Sundays.

What are your biggest challenges each day?

Time! So little time, so much to do. So I need to prioritize – God, my husband, my children, my family, work – in that order. Once I put God first, all the rest falls into place.

My father once said to me that a busy person is the best person to engage with because they know how to

schedule their day and make good use of their time.

And when I have so much to do and I don't know where to begin, I think of my mother saying to me, "Begin at the beginning." And slowly, methodically, I get things done.

What causes you stress? How do you manage that?

I don't use the word stress. I never say I am stressed. I go to the gym, for example, not to lose stress, but to lose weight! Daily Mass is the biggest stress reducer.

Sometimes family matters arise that can cause me worry, e.g. an illness in the family. But I have learned to pray and leave those matters in God's hands.

Work has its own deadlines and pressures, but I don't let it get to me. My boss for many years once said to

me, “At the end of the day, work is just a job. Family and friends are more important.” Don’t get me wrong, I do work hard and always put in the hours out of justice and because I want to do my work well and strive to sanctify it, which is a big part of Opus Dei’s message. But I was taught not to make work my life.

Of course, a full-time stay-at-home mother also has important work to sanctify, her work in the home.

How do you balance your work and family life? Do you have time for friends too? How do you prioritize?

Work is important for me, but my family’s needs come first. I am fortunate that at IESE, we understand the value of family, while we also try to work as well as possible.

I have different groups of friends and try to set up appointments and make plans to see them. The trick is trying not to make it conflict with family time.

Technology and social media do make it easier to stay connected. We use a family Viber chat so my daughter in Spain doesn't miss out on our family activities in the U.S.

How do the activities of Opus Dei help you with your daily challenges?

The spiritual activities of Opus Dei help me re-charge and give me a boost to cope with the frenzy of daily life. It helps keep me optimistic and, more importantly, at peace. It also helps me be strong for my family.

Opus Dei shows me practical ways to live my faith and thus to become a better person. Finding a spiritual dimension in daily events simplifies

life and makes it easier to handle challenges that may arise.

Opus Dei also shows me what it means to be a Catholic and part of the universal Church. There are centers of Opus Dei all over the world, and wherever you go you feel that you are coming home because our Lord is right there in the Tabernacle waiting for you. The Founder of Opus Dei's love for our Lady and for the Holy Father is something I really like, and reminds me of how I was raised in the Philippines.

What else would you like to add?

There are many paths to God, but in Opus Dei I get to do what I enjoy doing and to strive for both material and spiritual goals. It certainly simplifies my life!

In my early 20s I learned that one can never be completely in control of

things. I can map out a plan of action and do my best, but at some point one has to trust that God is in charge. Life is complex, and Opus Dei has helped me understand that in every event, no matter how painful, one can see God's guiding hand. There's always a reason to smile.

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