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Interview with Mariano Fazio

The new Vicar General of Opus Dei talks about Pope Francis' reaction when he informed him of his appointment, and about the challenges he foresees.

Published by the Argentine Catholic News Agency (AICA).

12/24/2014

How did you receive the news of your appointment? What did Bishop Echevarría say to you?

It was certainly a surprise. In the Church, appointments are a call to serve others and not a chance to seek new titles in order to build up a good resume. The Prelate expressed to me his confidence and affection, and told me that this new responsibility requires a lot of prayer and the effort to accompany people closely. One of the ideas behind bringing in "new reinforcements" is to be able to travel and accompany people who are on the front line, to be close to them in order to listen and give encouragement.

When will you take up this new responsibility, and what practical consequences will it have for your life? What did you do as soon as you learned this news?

Before making it public, I wanted to share it with the Pope. Due to God's goodness I was able to have an audience with him on Thursday

afternoon and tell him the news before anyone else learned of it. He looks quite good, and is very cheerful and has enormous energy. He told me jokingly that people are going to say I received this appointment because I am the Pope's friend. We get along very well. Really, when you are with him the atmosphere is so pleasant and filled with trust that at the end I told him, while giving him a box of chocolates, "The real reason I brought these is to celebrate River Club's victory back in Argentina."

As regards my new responsibility, the appointment is dated December 10, but my work in Rome will begin at the end of January, after spending some days in Argentina and attending an activity of formation in Mexico.

You are the first non-Spaniard to hold this position. What significance do you see in this?

Nothing special. It's simply an expression of two things: that the Work was born and first developed in Spain, and at the same time that its mission is universal (it is now working in 69 countries), which over time is expressed in a variety of nationalities in every sector and responsibility. In fact, on the General Council and the Central Advisory, which assist the Prelate in governing, there are and have been people from a great variety of countries.

What will the new figure of Auxiliary Vicar mean for the government of the Work? What responsibilities will you have?

By naming an Auxiliary Vicar, the Prelate now has two Vicars he can work closely with. Thus his work, which has been increasing, can be more effectively carried out, and he will have added support at this stage of his mission. Although it is a figure

foreseen as a possibility, this is the first time it has been implemented. So with the passage of time we will need to discover the best ways to work efficiently.

The Auxiliary Vicar can take the Prelate's place in the tasks of government, so that now he can put more energy into his role as Father and shepherd, and rely on Fernando Ocariz for carrying out executive tasks.

What effect will your friendship have on the way Opus Dei's fidelity to the Pope is shown? What challenges has he presented to you?

Perhaps it will add some familiarity, but right from the first moment and always, the Work is completely in tune with the Pope. Bishop Echevarría has an excellent relationship with him and has already met with him several times.

The Work is here to serve the Church, following the path marked out by the Pope. Our entire specific charism of fostering an encounter with God in daily life is directed to this, to serving the Church and society, walking at the pace the Holy Father sets. He advised me in particular to pay close attention to the Prelate, to follow him very closely. And this is what I will try to do.

We are in a year between two synods on the family. What is your reaction to the controversies that have arisen between conservative and progressive groups?

Following what the Pope has said, I think we are going through a process of reflection and study, which is the synod, confident that its conclusions will be a great good for the Church. The Pope in his closing speech pointed out a number of temptations,

including that of being conservative or progressive. And he is asking that no one be either conservative or progressive, but that we see ourselves as being on a "synodal journey."

The Pope has said that the Church's doctrine is not open for discussion, but rather ways to improve pastoral care. So we are hoping that new proposals and ways to focus this care will emerge that will help us to get closer to the problems faced by families and find positive responses to present-day challenges. We need to find a new language to communicate the faith and the synod can certainly offer a lot in this regard.

The Pope has also said that the expression of different viewpoints in the synod is part of the process and that he, as Roman Pontiff, is the guarantee of unity in this dialogue of

different opinions. In Opus Dei, each one can have distinct opinions within the context of unity with the Pope. As an institution we are committed to supporting the Pope in the pastoral guidelines that he is urging the Church to undertake.

What message do you have for the faithful of Opus Dei in Argentina, the cooperators and those who take part in its formative activities, now that they will be seeing you much less frequently?

The Work is a great family and the important thing is to share our joy with others, especially with those most in need, closely united to the Father (as we call the Prelate) and to the Pope. May each one in his or her own place give a testimony of faith, of generosity, of fidelity to the Pope, of a commitment to solidarity, of joy, of work well done in the service of other men and women. This is a

moment to risk everything for God and for the others, and not remain trapped in a selfish search for well-being and in personal problems that shut us up in our own little world.

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