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Junior candidates in Opus Dei

In the Prelature of Opus Dei, junior candidates are people between fourteen and a half and sixteen and a half years old who, seeking to respond to a call from the Lord, have expressed their desire to join the Prelature when they reach the required age.

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The Opus Dei prelate's apostolate with young people

The prelature of Opus Dei has the mission of helping many men and women to achieve holiness in ordinary life. It is for all sorts of people, from all sorts of backgrounds and with all sorts of jobs. As part of this mission, the Prelature also offers formative activities for young people, an especially important apostolate because it helps them to develop the virtues that will enable them to grow in their Christian life. Saint Josemaría's teaching on the need for personal, one-to-one prayer with Our Lord helps them face their life decisions freely and responsibly.

Among the many young people who take part in the Prelature's apostolates, some may discover that God is calling them to dedicate their lives to Him in Opus Dei itself. Speaking about young people discovering their vocation, Saint John Paul II said: "The Christian community is the guardian and

messenger of this response, because it is sent by the Lord to reveal the ultimate meaning of life to adolescents or young people, thereby guiding them to discover their own vocation within the setting of daily life. Every life, in fact, is revealed as a vocation to be discovered and followed, because a life without a vocation can never be genuine”.¹ So we should not be surprised if God wants to show someone the broad outlines of his plan for their life, even from a very early age. It is something that has often happened in the history of the people of Israel and the Church: saints being called when still very young to serve God in a specific path.

Numerous testimonies from this age-old history show that youth is the ideal time to set the course of one's life towards a specific goal. In fact, in their meetings with young people, the Popes have constantly

encouraged them to discover whether the Lord is calling them. “What is God asking me to do? (...) If this question has arisen, let yourselves be guided by the Lord, and become volunteers in the service of the One who ‘came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many’ (Mk 10:45). Your life will achieve fulfilment in ways you cannot imagine”.² More recently, Pope Francis invited young people to have the boldness to fulfil the mission of the Church: “Today too, as always, the Lord needs you, young people, for his Church. My friends, the Lord needs you! Today too, he is calling each of you to follow him in his Church and to be missionaries. The Lord is calling you today! Not the masses, but you, and you, and you: each one of you. Listen to what he is saying to you in your heart. (...) Dear young people, please, don’t be observers of life, but get involved. Jesus did not remain an

observer, but he immersed himself. Don't be observers, but immerse yourself in the reality of life, as Jesus did.”³

Discernment of God's call to Opus Dei. The role of the Church and parents

Wanting to join Opus Dei implies a willingness to commit oneself for life. Like any response to a call from God, it is a voluntary act that must be carried out in full freedom, and with an awareness of what is entailed. Naturally, before making this type of decision, sufficient discernment is necessary. First of all, the person needs to be consistent in their behaviour, and to have a personal relationship with God. Furthermore, due to human nature and the ecclesial dimension of Christian life, prudence dictates that in such an important matter, advice must be

sought from those who are in a position to give it.

The Church, which is our mother, in fulfilling her mission of mediating between God and men, has established some criteria to help ensure that decisions involving someone's whole life can be taken with the maximum prudence and in complete freedom. With regard to age, the universal law of the Church has set the age of majority at eighteen; that is, the moment at which the faithful acquire the full capacity to act.⁴ At the same time, the Church does not ignore the nature of man and young people's capacity for committing themselves to God or making very important personal decisions. For this reason, the Church's universal canon law recognizes the fundamental right of the faithful to marry from the age of fourteen for women and sixteen for men, although, taking other factors

into account, in most countries a higher age is required for it to be legal in the civil sphere.⁵ Likewise, by universal law, the Church recognizes the right of minors who have reached the age of fourteen to sue and answer for themselves in an ecclesiastical trial, without the consent of their parents or guardians, in spiritual cases and related ones.⁶

The Holy See has established in the Statutes of the prelature of Opus Dei⁷ that only members of the faithful who have reached the age of majority, that is, who are eighteen or over, can join it fully. However, they can ask to be admitted a year and a half before that age, so as to start acquiring the necessary preparation before they join it legally. And because an even younger person can in some cases discern that God's plan for their life is for them to join Opus Dei, the Holy See has also laid it

down in the Statutes of the prelature⁸ that these faithful can ask to be admitted as “junior candidates”. This is allowed from the age of fourteen and a half.

At the same time, as a rule of prudence, the express permission of the person's parents is always required for them to be a junior candidate, or to ask to join Opus Dei before the age of eighteen. Parents, with their knowledge of their children and their experience of life, can and should help them to discern God's call realistically. Mindful of their mission as God's collaborators, Christian parents try to respect their children's consciences, without attempting to force their own opinions or projects upon them. It is natural for parents to receive their children's vocation gratefully, and to seek to support it with their prayer and affection, since it is a sign that their family has become a true

domestic Church,⁹ where the Holy Spirit nurtures His charisms.

Obviously, the mission of parents to bring up their children continues when one of them has become a junior candidate, and is just as important as it is for other young people. For their part, junior candidates are aware that their desire to live according to the spirit of Opus Dei should lead them to put greater effort into fulfilling their family duties and trying to be good children of their parents.

The situation of Opus Dei junior candidates

Junior candidates are boys or girls who have freely expressed their desire to join Opus Dei, when they reach the appropriate age, as numeraries, assistant numeraries, or associates (that is, as one of the faithful of Opus Dei who have greater availability for its apostolic

tasks and who therefore live in celibacy). They are not members of Opus Dei , but they try to behave, depending on their age, in accordance with all the demands that the vocation to Opus Dei entails. They receive the benefit of its spiritual store of riches, and contribute to them with their own good works. They continue to live with their parents and siblings; minors cannot live in any Centre of the prelature. They also continue studying at the same college, educational institution or school as before.

As stated above, junior candidates are not legally members of the Prelature, and do not acquire any legal obligations when they ask to be admitted as junior candidates. These young people receive the spiritual and pastoral help of Opus Dei, which takes the form of deep, intense Christian formation, adapted to their

age, so that they can practise their Christian faith consistently. They are helped to seek holiness and to carry out apostolate in their particular circumstances, learning, with specific examples, to act as good sons and daughters, good brothers and sisters, and good friends. They are recommended to study seriously, offering their work to God, and to develop the human virtues (diligence, loyalty, generosity, joy, etc.), as the foundation for the supernatural ones. In this way, they deepen their knowledge and practice of the spirit and apostolate of Opus Dei, and, with the help of spiritual direction, they grow in self-knowledge and mature in their decision.

If junior candidates wish, on reaching the age of sixteen and a half they can ask to join Opus Dei. If someone decides to stop being a junior candidate, there is no reason

why they should not take part in Opus Dei's formative activities. The fact that the Christian vocation to Opus Dei may turn out not to be God's project for their life after all does not mean they have failed in any way. On the contrary, God has used that time to enable them to acquire a level of human and spiritual formation that will be useful to them all their lives, and to develop the virtues that they will need to practise in their own surroundings.

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[1] John Paul II, Message for the 32nd World Day of Prayer for Vocations, October 18, 1994.

[2] Benedict XVI, Speech at the meeting with volunteers at the 26th World Youth Day, August 21, 2011.

[3] Pope Francis, Prayer Vigil with young people in Rio de Janeiro, July 27, 2013.

[4] Cf. can. 97 of the Code of Canon Law (CCL) and 909, § 1 of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEC).

[5] Cf. CCL can. 1083, and can. 800 of the CCEC.

[6] Cf. CCL can. 1478 § 3, and can. 1136 § 3 of the CCEC.

[7] Cf. Statutes nos. 17 and 20 § 1, 1º.

[8] Cf. Statutes no. 20 § 1, 4º.

[9] Cf. Second Vatican Council, Const. dogm. *Lumen gentium*, no. 11.

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