

INCORPORATION IN THE WORK

1. God brought Opus Dei into existence in order to awaken the world to the universal call to holiness. It does this by offering, to all the faithful who want it, Christian formation and spiritual help to put the great ideal of holiness, which is so obvious to Catholics, into practice. For this purpose the Church created the “Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei”, composed of priests and lay-people, who cooperate organically to achieve this aim, each in their own way, under the pastoral guidance of the Prelate.

This Prelature, like any other organic group within the Church, forms a special communion of saints. Any of the faithful who wish to cooperate in its work share in this communion of saints to some extent. Those who do not belong to Opus Dei but take part in its formational activities, benefit from Opus Dei’s spiritual resources, which they can contribute to by their good works, as well as helping with Opus Dei’s spiritual mission by their apostolate in the middle of the world. When receiving the means of formation of the Prelature, they do so in the ways established by the Prelate, but they have absolutely no obligation in canon law to continue receiving the help that the Work offers them, or to continue helping in its activities.

The faithful who are members of Opus Dei share fully in this special communion of saints, and dedicate themselves to the mission of the Prelature not only by specific actions but with their whole lives, in their own particular circumstances. By the fact of being faithful of the Prelature they have the right to receive the spiritual help (collective and individual means of formation; some sacraments, especially Penance and the Eucharist; and the word of God applied to their circumstances), and are under the Prelate’s jurisdiction in everything that refers to the mission of the Prelature.

2. Membership of this Prelature is one way of being ordinary Christians in the middle of the world, and so it does not entail committing oneself to make a certain number of specific contributions, but pledging one’s whole life. As St Josemaría often said, it is *to do Opus Dei on earth, being yourself Opus Dei*. Obviously, nobody is obliged to join Opus Dei, and those who join it do so because they are sure that they have received a call to it from God. Therefore, incorporation in the Prelature must be done voluntarily, freely, and with personal responsibility.

In fact, the Prelature of Opus Dei is made up of faithful who declare their free desire to be members of it, with the consent of the competent authority. As incorporation in Opus Dei includes a vocational commitment, it does not depend exclusively on the will of the person concerned; the Church too must try to discern whether that person possesses conditions that indicate that he or she has received this vocation. For this reason, the Statutes of the Prelature establish some general prerequisites for incorporation, and state that the approval of the Regional Vicar is required.

3. Incorporation is done by means of a declaration of intent by the person concerned, and a declaration by the person representing the authority of the Prelature for this act, in the presence of two witnesses. The member of the faithful who is being incorporated promises to remain under the Prelate’s jurisdiction, to dedicate himself or herself to the purpose of the Prelature, and to fulfill all the duties involved in belonging to Opus Dei as a Numerary, Associate or Supernumerary. The person representing the Prelature declares that Opus Dei will provide the person concerned with assiduous religious-doctrinal, ascetical, and apostolic formation, and with pastoral care from its priests, and that it will fulfill the other obligations it has towards its faithful. Additionally, in the case of Numeraries and Associates, who are more available to dedicate themselves to apostolic tasks of Opus Dei, a short, simple ceremony follows invoking God’s help to fulfill their commitment faithfully.

By this incorporation the person becomes a member of Opus Dei. The bond of communion contracted with the Prelature does not affect their canonical relationship with the diocese to which they belonged and continue to belong, since this incorporation does not alter their situation as one of the Church's ordinary faithful, and does not introduce any difference between them and other Catholics.

4. The requirements for incorporation in the Prelature are to be a faithful Catholic lay-person with the use of reason, to be eighteen or older – eighteen being the canonical age of majority – and to wish to take on the obligations involved in belonging to Opus Dei as a Numerary, Associate or Supernumerary. (These distinctions refer to the varying degrees of habitual availability of the faithful to dedicate themselves to the formational activities of the Prelature, resulting from the differing permanent circumstances; they do not denote differing degrees of membership of Opus Dei.)

In accordance with the experience of the Church in these matters, to guarantee the freedom of the person concerned and discern whether he or she possesses the necessary personal conditions, incorporation in the Prelature is done in several stages, as follows.

5. To be incorporated in the Prelature a person must first ask for admission. The only such requests that will be considered are those made in writing with the agreement of the Director of the relevant Centre of Opus Dei, addressed to the competent Ordinary of the Prelature (the Prelate or Regional Vicar). This request implies that the person has said 'Yes' to God's call. Accordingly, from that moment onwards the person is considered to be one of the faithful of the Prelature and tries to act as such, even though they have not yet acquired any commitment in canon law. Six months after the request, the Regional Vicar can grant the Admission.

Before it is granted the Prelature ascertains that the person concerned is acting with full freedom. In addition, it has to be expressly made clear that they understand that the vocation to Opus Dei is secular in nature, a vocation for ordinary faithful, without any change in their state, and that the pursuit of holiness in Opus Dei involves a commitment to work seriously, in order to earn their own living and be able to contribute to the upkeep of the apostolates.

After the person has been admitted, a year must go by before the Regional Vicar grants incorporation in the Prelature (which initially is only temporary). Therefore there is at least a year and a half between the person's asking for admission and coming under the Prelate's jurisdiction.

6. Asking for admission to Opus Dei represents a major step in someone's personal life, because they are saying 'Yes' to what they are sure is God's will for them. Their request implies taking on the moral duty of faithfulness to their own vocation, which would only disappear if the person concerned came to realise in conscience that it was not in fact God's will. In other words, at the moment when someone asks to be admitted to Opus Dei, they are responding to God's call permanently, but their duty of faithfulness is to God alone, and they do not yet contract any bond with the Prelature. However, from the moment they ask for admission, they live as members of Opus Dei and have the right to receive from the Prelature the pastoral care and formation that they need to fulfill their resolve; and in the measure in which they do so, they are subject (in a way that is similar to that of any of the faithful to their diocese) to the governance of the Prelature.

7. The first incorporation is called the "Oblation" in the Statutes. It can only be done a year after having been admitted, and it is temporary, for reasons relating to the guarantee of freedom and the suitability of the person concerned. It is valid until the following 19th March (the date was chosen in honour of St Joseph), and has to be renewed every year. The renewal has to be done on 19th March and requires the permission of the Vicar, which is presumed to be granted. The person concerned makes an internal act of the will to renew the incorporation and informs the local Director that he or she has done so.

To do the Oblation a person must be at least eighteen years old, which is the canonical age of majority. Therefore a request for admission can be made from the age of sixteen and a half onwards. If the person is not yet eighteen this request may not be made without the explicit consent of their parents.

8. After five years of temporary incorporations, the Regional Vicar (with the Prelate's confirmation)

can grant the final and permanent incorporation, the “Fidelity”.

The definitive nature of the bond of communion with the Prelature is an outward way of expressing the desire expressed from the start by the person concerned, and is a canonical determination of it. St Josemaría arranged that before doing the Fidelity the person concerned makes an express declaration before two witnesses, of committing oneself, on one’s honour as a Christian, to fulfill some obligations that are already implicit in the duty of fidelity to one’s vocation, and that are especially important in Opus Dei: to defend the spiritual, moral and juridical unity of the Work; to help the Directors with fraternal correction; and to make a still greater effort to be faithful to the teaching of the Church and the spirit of the Work, forming one’s conscience correctly by asking for advice when necessary, and always acting with full freedom and personal responsibility.

The faithful who have been incorporated as Numeraries and Associates usually wear a ring symbolizing the bond of fidelity, as is often done in other contexts (for example, the university rings and college rings worn in some countries). Naturally, if it looks odd to wear such a ring, it need not be worn, since it is not essential; and if someone loses their fidelity ring, it is not replaced.

After doing the final and permanent incorporation, the faithful of the Prelature acquire the habit of often renewing it interiorly, out of devotion, especially on 19th March, although, obviously, doing so has no further canonical significance.

9. While there are many faithful who, without belonging to Opus Dei, cooperate with its apostolates and benefit from its activities, belonging to the Prelature involves a canonical commitment that includes an obligation of justice to cooperate with the Prelature’s mission. Therefore before doing the Oblation, Numeraries and Associates freely cede the administration, use and usufruct of any property they may possess to whoever they choose, i.e. not necessarily to people who have anything to do with Opus Dei. The purpose of this is to ensure that their availability for tasks in the Work is not diminished by having to administer their property. In the same way, before doing the Fidelity they make a Will so as to be free from all such encumbrances. There is nothing to stop them from altering their Will, in all freedom, if circumstances make it advisable.

10. Priests who are incardinated into dioceses cannot belong to the Prelature. However, they can join Opus Dei through the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, which is an association of clergy which is necessarily and intrinsically united to the Prelature. Numeraries and Associates who are ordained to the priesthood are in canon law members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. Deacons or priests who are incardinated in other ecclesiastical circumscriptions (dioceses etc.) join and are incorporated in the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross in the same way as lay people join and are incorporated in the Prelature. The same procedure is followed, *mutatis mutandis*, with regard to the declaration made by the person concerned and by the representative of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross; and with regard to the amount of time between asking for admission and the stages of incorporation, etc. As the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross is inseparably united to the Prelature, with which it forms a single unit, priests (or deacons) who belong to the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross are full members of Opus Dei, although they are not in any way under the Prelate’s jurisdiction.

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