



## PRAYER

*O God, merciful Father, you granted your servant Bishop Alvaro the grace of being an exemplary pastor in the service of the Church and a most faithful son and successor of Saint Josemaría, the Founder of Opus Dei. Grant that I also may respond faithfully to the demands of the Christian vocation, turning all the circumstances and events of my life into opportunities to love you and serve the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Deign to glorify your servant Alvaro, and through his intercession grant me the favour I request ... (here make your petition). Amen.*

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father.

In conformity with the decrees of Pope Urban VIII, we declare that there is no intention of anticipating in any way the judgement of the Church, and that this prayer is not intended for public use. Those who obtain favours through the intercession of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo are requested to write to the Prelature of Opus Dei, Office for the Causes of Saints, 4 Orme Court, London W2 4RL.

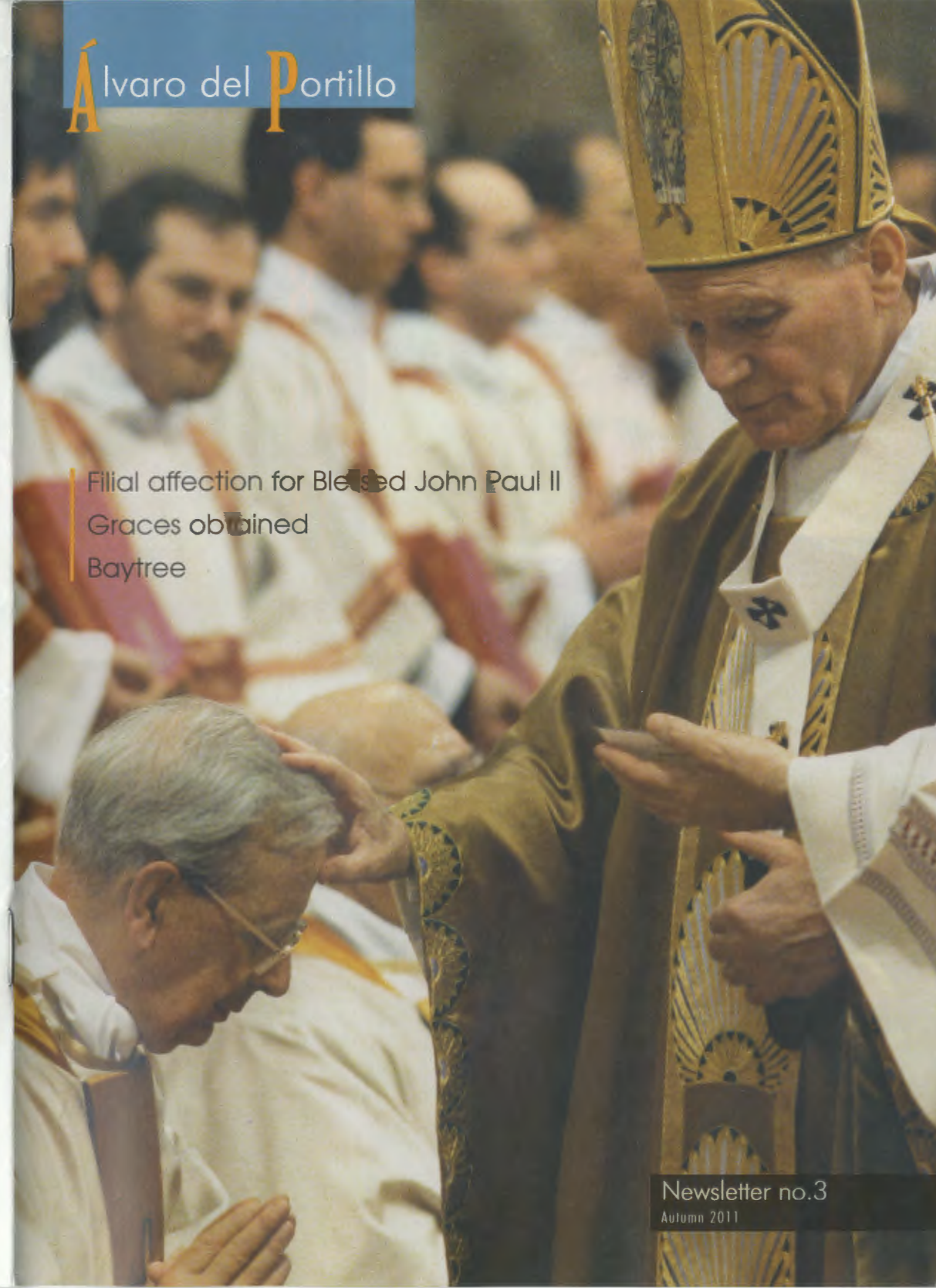
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We would be grateful if our readers would send us names and addresses of others who might be interested in receiving this Newsletter or the prayer card of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo.

*Imprimatur:*  
Bishop Javier Echevarría  
Prelate of Opus Dei

# Álvaro del Portillo



Filial affection for Blessed John Paul II  
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Baytree

Newsletter no.3  
Autumn 2011



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14 GRACES OBTAINED THROUGH DON ALVARO

Bishop Alvaro del Portillo was born in Madrid (Spain) on 11 March 1914. He held doctorates in Civil Engineering, Philosophy and Canon Law. In 1935 he joined Opus Dei. On 25 June 1944 he was ordained to the priesthood and two years later moved to Rome, where he worked very closely with Saint Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei. Alvaro del Portillo's service to the Church was shown also in his dedication to the tasks which the Holy See entrusted to him and, especially, through his active participation in the work of the Second Vatican Council. In 1975, after the death of Saint Josemaría, he was elected as his successor in the government of Opus Dei. On 6 January 1991 Pope John Paul II ordained him a bishop. The Servant of God's work of pastoral governance was characterised by his faithfulness to the spirit of the Founder and his zeal to extend the apostolates of the Prelature and the universal call to holiness throughout the world.

Early in the morning of 23 March 1944, a few hours after Don Álvaro's return from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, our Lord called this good and faithful servant to Himself. That same day, the Holy Father went to pray before his mortal remains, which now rest in the crypt of the prelatric church of Our Lady of Peace in Rome.

# E DITORIAL

*Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam!*

Don Álvaro repeated countless times this aspiration which St Josemaría sometimes used to sum up the purpose of Opus Dei: to bring souls to Jesus Christ, through the powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in close union with the Pope, who is the visible head of the Church. Just as "there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5), so all salvation comes through the Church which is the Body of Christ, whose Vicar on earth is the Roman Pontiff, who "as pastor of all the faithful, is sent to provide for the common good of the universal Church and for the good of the individual churches" (Second Vatican Council, Decree *Christus Dominus*, no. 2). Therefore, from the earliest times, Christians have affirmed that *ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia*, where Peter is, there is the Church, there is salvation. Don Álvaro liked to call to mind that "affective and effective union with the Pope is

an indispensable condition for apostolic fruitfulness in the Church. Our Lord pointed this out clearly: As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me (Jn 15:4). And in order to remain in Christ, we need to be totally united to his Vicar on earth, the Roman Pontiff."

The Servant of God helped many Christians to live united to the Holy Father seeing him and loving him as a father. Don Álvaro did this through his shining example of love for the Pope, which led him to spend his life generously spreading the Kingdom of Christ. When he became a bishop he chose as his episcopal motto the phrase *Regnare Christum volumus!* "We want Christ to reign!" It was a frequent theme in his preaching: "We must be very Roman, through our love for Peter's successor, which is expressed in prayer and mortification for him and his intentions, faithfulness to his teachings and a heartfelt obedience to his indications." ▲

• The day after the beatification of the Founder of Opus Dei (1992).



# FILIAL AFFECTION FOR BLESSED JOHN PAUL II

An outstanding feature of Don Álvaro's life was his deep and effective love for the Pope



• First audience with Pope John Paul II (1978).

“Christ. Mary. The Pope. Have we not just indicated, in three words, the loves that sum up the entire Christian faith?” These words of St Josemaría left a deep impression on Don Álvaro del Portillo ever since he came to know Opus Dei. A filial love and unity with the Roman Pontiff, whoever might be occupying the Chair of Peter, characterised his desire to serve God throughout his life.

His union with the Pope was both affectionate and effective and showed itself in many ways: several times each day he prayed for the Pope and his intentions, especially at Mass. In his

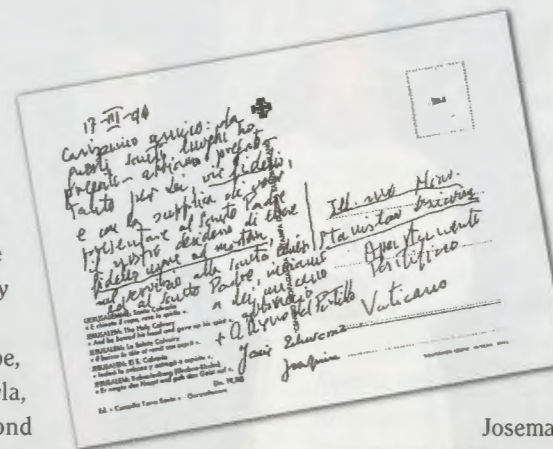
conversations and correspondence, he often asked the faithful of Opus Dei and many other people to pray and offer mortifications for the Vicar of Christ. He received the Pope's teachings with a sincere desire to pass them on to others.

His veneration for the “common Father of all Christians”, as he liked to call him, was also shown in simple gestures, but which expressed a deep sense of filiation. On 17 March 1994, for example, just six days before he died, he sent a postcard to Mgr Stanislaw Dziwisz, the secretary of Blessed John Paul II. In it Don

Álvaro asked him to transmit to the Pope “our desire of being *fideles usque ad mortem*, faithful unto death, in serving the Church and the Holy Father”.

He had met the Pope, then Bishop Wojtyła, during the Second Vatican Council, thanks to their mutual friend Mgr Deskur. There is no record of any further meeting until 5 November 1977 when the Archbishop of Cracow visited the headquarters of Opus Dei and prayed at the tomb of St Josemaría. Don Álvaro was deeply impressed by the future Pope's spiritual and human qualities. On 16 August 1978 Cardinal Wojtyła again visited Villa Tevere at Don Álvaro's invitation. The day after Pope John Paul II's election, 17 October 1978, Mgr del Portillo went to the Gemelli Hospital to visit Mgr Deskur who had suffered a stroke. When he left the room he was told that the Pope was about to arrive and that he should wait on that floor until the Pope's departure. When the Pope left Mgr Deskur's room he saw Don Álvaro and went and embraced him. The Servant of God was very moved to receive this expression of affection.

On 19 October, in prayerful response to that act of kindness, he went on pilgrimage to the Mentorella, a shrine dedicated to the Blessed Virgin which the Pope had often visited, and prayed for the Holy Father. From there he sent the Pope a postcard and the next day a letter to tell him that he could count on the thousands of Masses offered daily by the faithful of Opus Dei for the intentions of the person at the head of Opus Dei and that he was channelling them towards the Vicar of Christ. In reply, John Paul



II invited him to a private audience. It was an affectionate meeting, the first of many.

One of the tasks Mgr del Portillo had to undertake as the first successor of St

Josemaría was to obtain for

Opus Dei its definitive juridical status, which the Founder had desired and prepared.

On 28 November 1982, the Holy Father John Paul II, with the Apostolic Constitution *Ut sit*,



• Post card sent from Jerusalem to the secretary of Blessed John Paul II.

• First Audience with Pope John Paul II (1978).



• Don Álvaro and the present Prelate of Opus Dei with the Holy Father in 1983.

established Opus Dei as a personal Prelature and appointed Mgr Álvaro del Portillo as its Prelate. On 6 January 1991, he was ordained a bishop by the Pope in the Basilica of St Peter. This was not only a mark of personal recognition, but something very much in keeping with the mission of the Prelate of Opus Dei in the Church.

St Josemaría's beatification was another major event in Don Álvaro's life. It was with deep gratitude that he heard Blessed John Paul II pronounce the formula of beatification on 17 May 1992. Next day, by concession of the Holy Father, Don Álvaro celebrated a Holy Mass of thanksgiving in St Peter's Square, with hundreds of thousands of pilgrims taking part. After the ceremony, visibly moved, he wished the Pope a happy birthday, it was his 72nd

birthday, and thanked him for this sign of deference for the new Blessed and kindness to Opus Dei.

Another reason for his gratitude was Pope John Paul's fatherliness in receiving each year the participants in the UNIV University congress during Holy Week. They were family-like gatherings in the *Cortile di San Damaso* or in the Paul VI audience hall, in which the Holy Father enjoyed a moment of rest and students from all over the world listened with eager attention to the words of the Vicar of Christ. Mgr del Portillo was always quick to respond to the pastoral initiatives of Blessed John Paul II. Thus, to give some examples, he transmitted to the people coming to the means of formation of Opus Dei in Rome that it was the Pope's desire that they should go to St Peter's to

attend the episcopal ordination of his successor in the archdiocese of Cracow. He prompted many students to take part in the Masses celebrated each year by the Pope for university students and ensured that many priests of the Prelature were available to administer the sacrament of Penance during those ceremonies. When the Holy Father made trips to different countries round the world, Don Álvaro played an active role in encouraging the faithful to give the Pope a very warm reception. He spoke out in favour of pontifical initiatives for peace and ecumenism, etc. In fulfilment of a wish of St Josemaría, Mgr Álvaro del Portillo initiated the Roman Athenaeum of the Holy Cross, now the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. He gave support to Cardinal Caffarra in setting up the *Istituto Giovanni Paolo II* for the family and in his defence of the teaching of the Pope Paul VI's Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which he saw as desires of the Roman Pontiff.

This unity of Don Álvaro with the Pope went further than a personal affinity with Blessed John Paul II. It resulted from a deep vision of faith: the Holy Father is the Vice-Christ. And so he prepared all his meetings with the Roman Pontiff with much prayer, and he was moved when received in audience or was the subject of a sign of esteem from the Pope. In keeping with this, he loved to receive the Pope's blessing and frequently asked for it before embarking on his apostolic journeys so as to transmit it to the people he was to meet.

Early in the morning of 23 March 1994, the Servant of God gave up his life to God in a holy manner. A few hours before that, he had returned to Rome from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. At half past six that morning, Mgr Echevarría, who was the Vicar General of Opus Dei at the time, telephoned Mgr Dziwisz, to ask him to let the Holy Father know that Mgr del

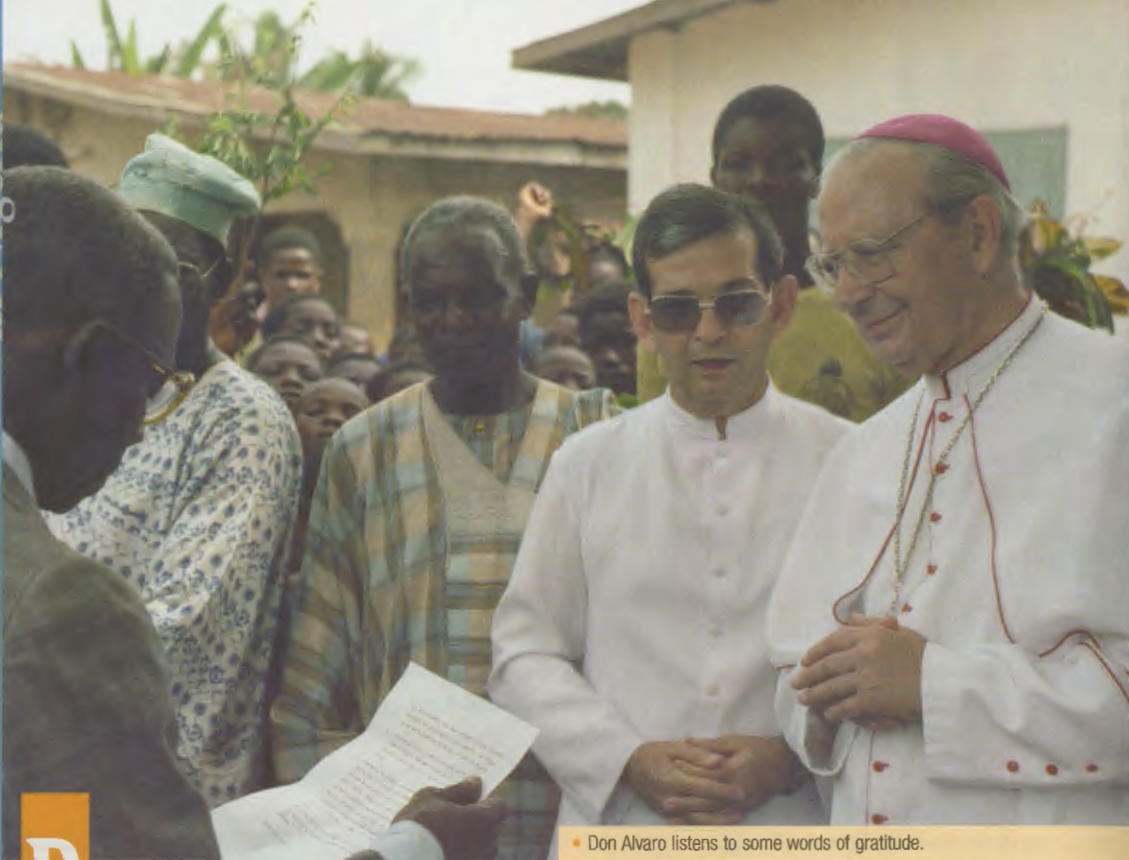
Portillo had died. Blessed John Paul II immediately let him know that he would offer the Mass he was about to celebrate for the soul of the Prelate of Opus Dei.

That very afternoon the Holy Father went to pray in the church where Don Álvaro's body lay and was there profoundly recollected. The Pope was asked if he wished to pray a response, but he preferred to intone the *Salve Regina* and then said three Glorias and the invocation *Requiem aeternam dona ei, Domine*, and *Requiescat in pace*. He sprinkled holy water on Don Álvaro's remains and knelt once again in prayer. When he went out, the Holy Father gave his blessing to those taking part.

Mgr Echevarría thanked the Holy Father for this kind act. Blessed John Paul II replied in Italian that he felt it his duty to come: *Si doveva, si doveva*, were his words. ▲



• The Holy Father visits the ELIS Centre in Rome (1984).



• Don Alvaro listens to some words of gratitude.

# PASTORAL TRIP TO NIGERIA

“You can’t make soup if there’s no water in the pot”

Don Alvaro visited Nigeria from 9th to 20th of November 1989. This was his last trip to Africa, coming at the end of a series of apostolic journeys there within that year, covering Kenya, DR Congo (formerly Zaire), Cameroon and Cote d’Ivoire. What’s more, it was the last time he left Europe, not counting the visit he made to the Holy Land in 1994 just before he died. In Nigeria he met several Bishops and visited his daughters and sons and many other people who were in contact with the

apostolic projects run by faithful and co-operators of Opus Dei. He also went to the Centres of the Prelature which had been set up in Lagos, Ibadan, Iroto and Enugu, in which he blessed some newly-built oratories, and dedicated several altars. In Iroto, where the faithful of Opus Dei run a conference centre, he was greeted respectfully by people from the villages round about, who thanked him for the apostolic work done there to benefit them and many other people from all over Nigeria.

Altogether about six thousand people heard him speak in the six catechetical encounters he held during those eleven days. He also received a good number of families separately. He always tried to adapt his teaching to his hearers’ mentality. In a gathering in Enugu, for instance, he talked about a saying he had just learnt from the diocesan Bishop: “You can’t make soup if there’s no water in the pot”. Don Alvaro remarked that we need to have the “water” of grace in the apostolate, and then to add the right seasoning, meaning the effort we each make to bring souls to God.

During his stay in Nigeria Don Alvaro gave of himself unstintingly to all the Nigerians he met. His affection was contagious. On the last day, when he was at the airport waiting for his flight, he spent time talking to each of the people – mostly parents of families – who had gone to see him off. Finally he gave a hug to one of the customs officers who, attracted by the group of people, decided to come and say farewell to him too.

Don Alvaro was seventy-five years old at the time, and although he was in good health a journey such as this one carried its own risks. He generally suffered from the heat, and in Nigeria it is never cool. The photos taken during his trip show something of the high temperatures he encountered: he wears a white cassock, as priests normally do in tropical countries, and is sometimes protected by an umbrella. He bore the discomfort of the heat with his habitual good humour, never making a fuss about it, and said thank-you to everyone who tried to mitigate its effects somewhat. A little episode reflects how much Don Alvaro’s visit meant to the Nigerians who

met him. In Iroto, on 16th November, there was a catechetical gathering with a large number of people from Benin City. When Don Alvaro arrived a little girl came forward to present him with a bunch of flowers. Afterwards she told her mother, “Mum, the Father kissed me on the forehead, so I’m not going to wash it ever again.”



• (Top) Don Alvaro with a Nigerian family.  
• (Below) A traditional dance performed at the end of a get-together.



## “PEACH” FOR GIRLS AND THEIR MUMS

A project in Baytree, London

“Since my daughter joined the PEACH Project, she has been a lot more positive and criticizes less. She used to complain about everything. Now she is more of an action person rather than simply just words ... she has many friends and spends less time watching TV at home. She is also taking her study at school and home more seriously, because she sees her mentor (a young professional in the field of law) as her role model.”

PEACH is an acronym which stands for Parents Education Achievement and Character. This project delivers an individualized learning approach, designed especially according to the unique needs of each girl and her parents. The PEACH project was started 2 years ago by the Baytree Centre in Brixton, South London.

Baytree is a community-based social inclusion

project in an area with an index of multiple deprivation ranked in the national top 10%. Baytree specializes in enabling inner city women and girls to transform their aspirations into realities, in spite of the obstacles facing them. In a typical year Baytree services an average of 500 women, 300 girls and 100 children, and provides extensive volunteering opportunities to those who wish to “give something

back”. The centre was set up nearly 20 years ago under the active encouragement of Don Alvaro del Portillo when he was Prelate of Opus Dei.

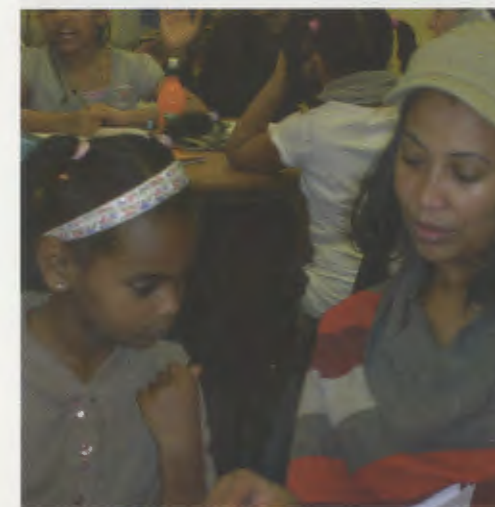
In the last 2 years the PEACH Project has supported a total of 114 inner city families of all faiths. A key requirement for each family is the participation of both child and at least one parent, thus fostering positive parenting and family values which Baytree promotes because of its Christian ethos inspired by St Josemaría.

PEACH comprises an Integrated Mentoring Programme and a Family Enrichment Programme, involving children and parents respectively. The two programmes are not separate but are intertwined and work together to achieve a common objective in “enabling each girl and her parents to achieve their personal and educational potential with a view to giving back to the community”.

PEACH has continued to set high standards in the areas of academic progress, fostering good study habits through systematic time management and goal setting. Real changes occur in the lives and families of the girls through PEACH’s Personal development programme which focuses closely on three areas: maturity of character (becoming the best person we can be); positive relationships within the family, school and community; and thirdly, on making a positive difference in the lives of others by developing a culture of service. All those attending have felt that they give more respect to their parents, friends and others by taking into consideration the other’s opinion highly, the majority now help much more at home, and some PEACH girls have themselves now taken on volunteering roles at Baytree, wanting to give something back to the organization that has made a difference for them.

In the words of a mum: “I have never had a good role model of a parent. Now, after joining PEACH, I am much more confident in raising up my children, not to be afraid to say no to things that I know are not a good influence for them.”

But PEACH is not only about the beneficiaries, the volunteers who make it possible also draw a great deal from their experience: “Spending time helping a PEACH girl see the world from a perspective other than the one she is probably used to, helps me do the same. It expands my view of society and of the world in general. If I stopped mentoring, I would miss the simple pleasure of helping a girl realise that Maths isn’t so impossible and that getting better at Maths, or at anything really, is mostly a matter of changing your attitude towards it.” ▲



# CROTONA

Our aim is to help young men turn their lives into something worthwhile



The Bronx is a district of New York with a reputation for social unrest. However, the truth, thank God, is something richer. One need only open one's eyes to see that.

Crotona Center, which started as an initiative of members of Opus Dei and their friends, is to be found at 843 Crotona Park North. Some years ago a generous donation from a local firm enabled us to refurbish the premises. Until then they had been in a pretty poor state.

Boys from 10 to 18 come to activities at Crotona. They come because they know Crotona will help them to take their

academic and human development seriously. "We're not here only to give the boys academic advice, nor only to organize some great times of entertainment. Our mission is to help them to improve as persons, to make demands on themselves, to turn their lives into something worthwhile, offering them solid Christian formation", says Eddie Llul, activities coordinator at Crotona.

"There was a time", Kevin who is a student at Crotona recognizes, "when what I looked for from the boys at school was their attention, not their friendship. The fact is I

didn't even know what friendship was. I knew that if I did something stupid in class the others would laugh, and so I did stupid things to feel accepted.

"In Crotona I learnt, above all through experience, that friendship is a relationship based on truth, love and respect for personal freedom. What does this mean? Well, now I try to understand my friends the way they are and not the way I want them to be. It's curious, but the more I understand them, the more I appreciate their good points."

Boys come to Crotona from 4 pm onwards. The first thing they do is to get down to study. They do their school homework and check whatever questions they may have with their tutors. After this they have a get-together with the others chatting in the warm and comfortable sitting room: it's a splendid opportunity to learn to listen and to share ideas and plans with others. Ordinary activities on school days are complemented by special activities on Saturdays and summer activities.

"True, some people look on us with scepticism," says David Holzweiss. "They think the formation we offer is too demanding for the boys. How can you expect a boy to want to get formation?, they say. And they think we're not telling them the truth.

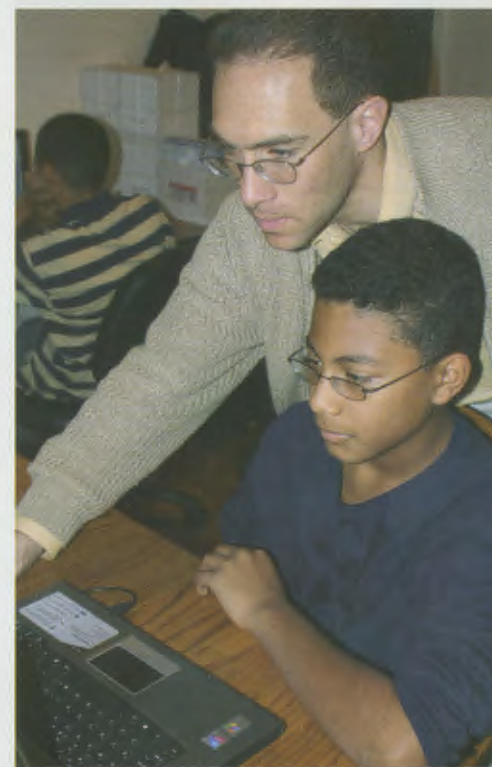
"But the Lord could also have said: 'These men don't understand anything, so I will just tell them a few vague things'. But that's not what he did. He told them the whole truth." ▲

Crotona Center

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# FAVOURS OBTAINED THROUGH DON ÁLVARO'S INTERCESSION

the youngest of the group, after having dived into the water, came out with the keys in his hand and a smile on his lips. He explained "I prayed to Don Alvaro".

*A.A., Abidjan (Ivory Coast)*

## Paying the instalments... and much more

Our family in Catania has managed to maintain, until the end of their studies, three children at the University of Rome. Because of our precarious financial situation, it looked like an impossible task, but our family put things under the patronage of Don Alvaro, saying the prayer of the prayer card; and each time that difficulties arose, thanks to a clear intervention from heaven, our family has been able to pay all the installments within the allotted time. The grace which I, the mother, had asked for was, precisely, that he help us to make all our payments. Our family has been granted many other favours through Don Alvaro's intercession, such as union and concord among us, six people always having to struggle with thousands of temptations. For all this I thank the Good God who has given us such a wonderful intercessor.

*P.M., San Giovanni La Punta (Italy)*

## Getting a job

Even though I had two degrees, one in Economics and the other in Administration, I couldn't find employment even though I had applied and been interviewed by several firms. I told my aunt. She gave me several prayer cards of Don Alvaro, and told me: hand them out to people and pray to him with faith. I did that and to my surprise my mobile phone immediately rang. It was a girl I knew telling me that a friend of hers, whom I did not know, urgently needed an administrator whom he could trust. I contacted him, was interviewed and, within a week, I

was working there. Now I am delighted with my job and I feel a real need to report this favour I've received. I tell my story to everyone I can. I'm still saying the prayer and I gave many thanks to God for having granted me this thing I so much wanted: to be allowed to do an honest job of work.

*L.G.P., Maracaibo (Venezuela)*

## Less than one in a hundred

My sister-in-law Gloria was eight months pregnant, expecting her fifth daughter when the doctors diagnosed a worrying anomaly which they called "placenta praevia". A few days later she had a haemorrhage and was taken to hospital by ambulance. After an emergency caesarean, little Amanda came into the world weighing just over five pounds but at least her life had been saved. Gloria, meanwhile, was still losing blood and her situation was getting worse hourly.

When the news spread we, her relatives and friends, decided to ask Don Álvaro for her recovery. Two days after going into hospital, when I went to visit see her, I said the prayer card prayer with her mother and two other sisters-in-law. By that stage Gloria had received fifty-one units of blood and her kidneys were beginning to fail. A few minutes earlier she had received the anointing of the sick. It looked as if no more could be done.

At eight o'clock the next morning, her husband phoned me. He was over the moon. That night her signs of life had come back to normal. The hospital staff said it was a miracle, because looking at her chart, her possibilities of survival had been less than one in a hundred. Her convalescence has been a long affair but has been satisfactory. For me this has been a clear sign of the power of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick and Don Álvaro's intercession.

*P.M.H. (United States)*

## Don Álvaro had received them

My parents had not been getting on well together for

years. As they had once been to visit Don Álvaro, I asked my mother to pray to him so that the situation might change. I too prayed. Some time later, my mother called to tell me there had been a miracle. My father had begun to treat her very kindly. My brothers and sisters also were amazed at the change that had come over our parents. I am very grateful to Don Álvaro del Portillo for helping us so effectively.

*A.P. (France)*

## Two hearts beating

My husband and I had been married nearly six years. We got married young. He was 23 and I 25. Our greatest wish was to have a family. From the start we wanted to accept the children God would send us. A year passed.

And another. No children came. We began to wonder if there was some problem. We had medical checks but everything was fine. We did not know who to turn to, what saint to pray to. We visited many Marian shrines. Our petition was always the same: "Grant us a child, grant us a child, please!" (...)

After praying so much for a child, our faith began to weaken. I kept asking Our Lord for more and more faith, each day at Mass, and he gave it to me. With Don Álvaro's prayer card in my hand, I thought of starting a novena. I knew that Our Lord wanted my husband and me to be united and I asked my husband to pray it with me. Both of us did the novena of prayers to Don Álvaro with a lot of faith. When the time came we did the pregnancy test but it was negative. Two days later, and without us knowing that it was 23 March, the day on which Don Álvaro went to be with Our Lord for ever (...), the pregnancy test proved positive. We could hardly believe it!

At first we thought there might be some mistake. A few days later we went to the doctor and we were able to see with our own eyes the present which had come to us from heaven: it was a double one, because there were two hearts beating; we were expecting twins!

*C.M.R. (Spain)*



## I prayed to Don Alvaro

We were in a work camp by lake Kossou. It was Sunday and we had decided to go by minibus to bathe in the lake. There were about fifteen of us, about half those taking part in the camp. After half an hour I got out of the water and discovered that I'd lost the keys to the minibus. It was five p.m., the place we were staying was a good way away, and the spare keys were in Abidjan, more than 250 kilometres away. We searched the water for 45 minutes but didn't find anything. Then I asked Don Alvaro to help, even though I don't like "bothering" him for material needs, as the situation was becoming unbearable. I made up my mind and said to him, after saying the prayer for private devotion, "Get me out of this difficulty!" Two or three minutes later, Yannick,