Pastoral Letter of February 14, 2017

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

1. I have been wanting very much to write to you again, now at more length. With this letter I want to let you share in the conclusions of the last General Congress, held in Rome this past January. I am doing so because, like Don Javier in 2010, I want all of you to feel the weight of the Work, the weight of souls, the responsibility of taking forward this small family that we are. With the whole Church, we aspire, in St Paul's words, to reconcile the world to God (see *2 Cor* 5:19). This is an immense task that would be too much for us if we did not rely on God's grace.

As I told you in St Josemaría's words, in my first letter as Father of this small part of the Church, our mission is to redeem and sanctify our time, to understand and share the concerns of our fellow men and women. I now take up the thread of those words: "It is not true that everyone today—in general—is closed or indifferent to what our Christian faith teaches about mankind's being and destiny. It is not true that people in our time are turned only toward the things of this earth and have forgotten to look up to heaven. There is no lack of narrow ideologies, it is true, or of people who maintain them. But in our time we find both great desires and base attitudes, heroism and cowardice, zeal and disenchantment: men who dream of a new world, more just and more human, and others who, discouraged perhaps by the failure of their youthful idealism, hide themselves in the selfishness of seeking only their own security or remaining immersed in their errors.

"To all these men and women, wherever they may be, in their more exalted moments or in their crises and defeats, we have to bring the solemn and unequivocal message of St Peter in the days that followed Pentecost: Jesus is the cornerstone, the Redeemer, the hope of our lives. 'For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (*Acts* 4:12)' ".[1]

All with Peter to Jesus through Mary

2. The Pope is, for the Church, Peter who announces Christ to the world, proclaiming the joy of the Gospel.[2] The General Congress reaffirmed in the first place our filial union with the Roman Pontiff, and once again made its own the prayer that St Josemaría taught us: *omnes*

1. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By,* 132.

2. See Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, November 24, 2013, *Incipit*.

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam.[3]

We are grateful to Pope Francis, among many other reasons, for the Jubilee Year of Mercy, his example of piety and austerity, the apostolic stimulus that he is giving to the whole world, and his closeness to people, especially the most needy. We are also grateful for his decision, in the exercise of his Petrine ministry, to beatify Don Alvaro. The Congress also expressed its gratitude to the Pope for having confirmed me as successor of St Josemaría, Blessed Alvaro, and Don Javier at the head of Opus Dei, and for appointing me as Opus Dei's Prelate on the very same day as my election. I wrote to you earlier that I felt somewhat embarrassed, and at the same time joyful for the unity given to us by the Holy Spirit, infinite Love. My only desire in life is to be a good Father to each of you, by sharing, despite my limitations, in God's loving fatherhood. I am also moved by the fact that, in a letter dated 1st February, the Pope wrote to encourage me and place me under the care of Our Lady

Building upon rock

3. How are we to respond to so many graces, my daughters and sons? Let us renew our desire to incarnate and communicate the spirit of Opus Dei faithfully, as it was passed on to us by St Josemaría, building on a deep sense of our divine filiation in Christ, and determined to seek God in our professional work and in the ordinary circumstances of our life, in order to be salt and light of the world (see *Mt* 5:13-14). How great is the Christian vocation! It leads to our mysterious identification with the incarnate Word, which St John Paul II once expressed with daring words, taking up an expression from the Second Vatican Council: "Through the grace received in baptism, man participates in the eternal birth of the Son of the Father, for he becomes an adoptive son of God: a son in the Son." [4]

4. Don Javier was a good son of God by being a faithful son of St Josemaría. That fidelity was the *raison d'être* of his life. He was our Prelate from 1994 to 2016, and the General Congress gave thanks to God for his life and his teachings. It has also echoed the desire of all the faithful of the Prelature, the members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross and the Cooperators, to highlight Don Javier's love for the Church and for this portion of the People of God that is Opus Dei. Don Javier left a fruitful example of pastoral charity, which was expressed in his union with the Holy Father and with all of his brothers in the episcopal college, in his zeal for souls, and in his active solicitude for the sick and the most needy. Therefore, certain that it will cause you joy, I want to record here the general opinion of the members of the Congress, and of so many other people, that it will be advisable to

3. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 833.

4. St. John Paul II, Homily, 23 March 1980. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et spes,* 22.

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

collect memories and testimonies about Don Javier and about his self-sacrificing life and teachings.

Moreover, the Congress has affirmed the good being done by the causes of beatification and canonization of faithful of the Work in various countries, and the importance of continuing to spread private devotion to them. In this way we will help many souls discover divine love and the joy of living a Christian life in the middle of the world, to which Venerable Isidoro Zorzano and Venerable Montserrat Grases, among others, have given testimony. In crowning the merits of the saints, the Lord crowns his own gifts.[5] Through the saints we honor the Thrice-Holy God and we renew our own desires for sanctity: our love for God and for others in Him.

5. The Administrations of the Centers of Opus Dei, the "apostolate of apostolates," are as it were its "spinal column." [6] The Congress has wanted to underline, once more, the decisive role of their work in making the family atmosphere in the Work real and in helping those who come to our houses to grasp it in a visible way. Let us respond to this gift by praying that our Lord may bless this apostolate with abundant vocations, and that it may be a radiant example of the value and dignity of work in the home. The women of the Prelature will review the services provided by the Administrations according to present circumstances and needs, so that they continue sustaining the atmosphere of a home, the human and family tone that truly makes each Centre a Bethany for us.

6. To those who were *Custodes* for Don Javier the Congress expressed its gratitude for their dedication in assisting him. In addition, it recognized the great help provided by the elderly and sick faithful of the Prelature, with the joyful and simple offering of their limitations, in spurring forward the continuing efforts of evangelization that the Work is carrying out throughout the world. Part of this quiet assistance, certainly, is the refined care of those who look after them with affection and a spirit of generous service, following the tradition we inherited from St Josemaría as an important part of our family spirit. My daughters and sons, so much depends on how we care for the elderly and the sick!

The General Congress also gave recognition to your brothers and sisters who, during these years, began the apostolic work in new countries, leaving their place of origin to help carry out the Work in other latitudes. You will recall how frequently Don Javier stressed that there are many good people waiting for us everywhere.

Present challenges in the adventure of formation

7. Our apostolic dynamism, the

5. Cf. *The Roman Missal*, Preface I of Saints.

6. Don Javier, Letter, 28 November 2002, 18 in *Family Letters (5)*, 125. Cf. *Instruction*, 31 May 1936, 66.

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

fruit of the Holy Spirit, has been sustained by the deep work of formation that the Prelature offers its faithful, and that constitutes its mission: "the whole world becomes a great catechesis." [7] The Congress wanted to emphasize some of the content of that formation in present-day circumstances. Allow me to list them below, so that in each circumscription of the Prelature, in each Centre, in each family of my daughters and sons, in each soul, the light and power of grace will make us see what more we can do and, above all, how we can do better what we are already doing.

8. In first place is the centrality of the Person of Jesus Christ, whom we want to get to know, deal with, and love. Putting Jesus at the center of our life means deepening in our contemplative prayer in the middle of the world, and helping others to travel along "paths of contemplation."[8] It means rediscovering with new light the anthropological and Christian value of the various ascetical means; reaching the person in all of his or her integrity: intellect, will, heart, relations with others; fostering interior freedom, which leads us to do things for love; helping people to think, so that each person can discover what God is asking of them and make decisions with full personal responsibility; nourishing confidence in God's grace, in order to be on the alert against voluntarism and sentimentalism; expressing the ideal of Christian life without confusing it with perfectionism, and teaching people how to live with and accept their own weakness and that of others; practicing, with all its consequences, a daily attitude of hopeful abandonment to God's will, grounded on divine filiation.

In this way the sense of mission that our vocation entails will be strengthened along with our complete and joyful self-giving. We are called to contribute, with initiative and spontaneity, to improving the world and the culture of our times, so that God's plans for mankind are opened up: *cogitationes cordis eius,* the plans of his heart which are sustained *from generation to generation* (*Ps* 33 [32]:11).

In this regard it is good to encourage everyone to seek to live with their heart set on God, and therefore detached from material things. Free to love: this is the meaning of our spirit of poverty, austerity and detachment, evangelical themes greatly valued by Pope Francis' magisterium.

Moreover, our love for the Church will spur us to obtain resources for the development of the apostolates, and to foster in everyone a great professional eagerness: in those who are still students and should harbor great desires to build up society, and in those who are carrying out a profession. With a right intention, they should foster the holy ambition of going far in

7. St. Josemaría, Notes from a get-together, 6 February 1967, in *Noticias* 1967, p. 84 (AGP, Library, P02).

8. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God,* 67.

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

their profession and of making an impact. At the same time, I encourage all Numerary men and women to have an active and generous availability, when necessary, to dedicate themselves with the same professional eagerness to tasks of formation and government.

9. This broad panorama invites us to renew our zeal for expansion, as in the early days of the Work, in order to bring the joy of the Gospel to many souls, so that many people may feel "the attraction of Christ." [9] Our Father used to tell us: "If we want there to be more of us, let us be better." [10] I would like this consideration to stir up in us a renewed sense of urgency in seeking, with God's grace and people's free and generous response, many vocations—all those that God wants—of Numeraries, Associates, Supernumeraries and priests of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross.

Freedom and vocation: here we have two essential dimensions of our human life, which call out to one another. We are free in order to love God who calls, God who is love and puts love into us so that we can love him and love others.[11] This charity makes us fully aware of our mission, which is not "an apostolate exercised sporadically or occasionally, but habitually and by vocation, taking it as the ideal of our whole life." [12] This ideal of love of God and others leads us to cultivate friendship with many people: we do not "do apostolate," we are apostles! This is the path of the "Church that goes forth," of which the Pope speaks frequently, reminding us of the importance of tenderness, magnanimity, and personal contact.

This "dynamism of 'going forth' which God wants to provoke in believers," [13] is not a strategy, but the actual strength of the Holy Spirit, uncreated Charity. "In a Christian, in a child of God, friendship and charity form a single thing: divine light which gives warmth." [14] The current situation of evangelization makes it more necessary than ever to give priority to personal contact. This relational aspect is at the heart of the mode of doing apostolate that St Josemaría found in the Gospel narratives. "It can well be said, my dearest children, that the greatest fruit of Opus Dei's work is the fruit its members obtain personally through their apostolate of example and loyal friendship." [15]

Giving and receiving formation

10. In preparing and giving the means of formation, we are enthused

9. St. Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, 1 April 1962 (AGP, Library, P09, p. 46).

10. St. Josemaría, *Instruction*, 8 December 1941, note 122.

11. See St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 270.

12. St. Josemaría, *Instruction*, May 1935-14. September 1950, 15.

13. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 20.

14. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 565.

15. St. Josemaría, *Letter 11 March 1940*, 55.

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

when we think of their fruitfulness in souls, through the grace of God who gives the growth (see *1 Cor* 3:6). In addition to putting the supernatural means very much in first place, we need to make an effort to use clear language, a positive and encouraging tone, and to give a hope-filled view of the world in which we are called to live, which is where we meet God. We should encourage active participation, and show the practical effects of the spirit of Opus Dei on family and social life, so that there is a growth in unity of life—a real, Christian consistency between what people think, the way they pray, and the way they live (see *Jn* 4:24; *Rom* 12:1; *2 Thess* 3:6-15).

11. For our fraternity and the apostolate of friendship and confidence, certain virtues are of great importance: humility, as well as joy and generosity. Also necessary is a sincere interest in others that takes the form of understanding them, along with respect and appreciation for different opinions. A positive tone in conversation enables us to better focus the questions being discussed. Ultimately, it is a matter of "being sowers of peace and of joy," [16] as our Father taught us, and of rectifying in a sportsmanlike manner when, instead of peace, we have sown a bit of discord. Our Centers, and the houses of the Associates, the Supernumeraries and the priests of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, have to radiate the attractive warmth of a home (see *Ps* 133 [132]:1; *Jn* 13:34-35).

I remember the peace and serenity that was radiated just by the presence of Don Alvaro, who practiced what he taught us: "This family spirit is so essential for us that every daughter and son of mine carries it always with them; so strong that straight away it can be seen in and around us, making it possible for us to create a family atmosphere in any place where we happen to be. That is why our being and feeling ourselves to be a family is not based on the material fact of living under the same roof, but on the spirit of filiation and fraternity which God has wanted for his Work from the first moment." [17]

12. I ask our Lord that we may put a special effort into the formation of those who give personal spiritual direction, whether priests or laity, so that they are able to help others with dedication and skill. With the grace of God, they have to lead people to be generous in receiving the touches of the Holy Spirit, who speaks in the depths of their hearts (see *Mt* 10:20). Good example and the careful fulfillment of our professional, family, and social obligations are indispensable for helping others to follow our Lord. Our Father taught us that good professional standing, seen as authentic service, is "your bait as a fisher of

16. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, 30.

17. Blessed Alvaro, Letter, 1 December 1985, in *Family Letters (1)*, 204.

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

men." [18] Faith enlightens people's minds and gives meaning to their lives; it opens up a new dimension that leads them to Life in Christ.

13. We should take specific steps to provide on-going professional formation for those who direct apostolic works. The goal is to improve their capacity to direct and guide individuals and teams. Their responsibility to strengthen the Christian identity of these works, the quality of their functioning, and the service they offer to society, is a great one. Collegiality is an art which cannot be improvised; those involved must learn how to listen, exchange views, share opinions, and bring out the best in each person.

In the Church

14. For the new evangelization to be fruitful, communion among Catholics themselves is decisive. Part of our mission in the great family of God's sons and daughters is to increase mutual appreciation among the faithful in the Church and all the very varied groups that can exist there. "The principal apostolate we Christians must carry out in the world, and the best witness we can give of our faith, is to help bring about a climate of genuine charity within the Church." [19] To do this, we need to strengthen, as appropriate in each case, our relationships with those in other Church institutions and entities. Practicing collective humility, we need to overcome possible misunderstandings and pray for the initiatives promoted by others.

15. The help offered to priests and seminarians is also very important for the good of the Church and of society. The Associate and Supernumerary members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, participating fully in the vocation to the Work, are active at the front lines, where they give a new dynamism to all the apostolates. They do so while fully respecting their sole dependence on their own Bishop, and within the context of their pastoral ministry. They normally carry out this ministry entirely and directly at the service of the diocese in which they are incardinated, which they should love more and more.

All the faithful of Opus Dei are called to pray for the Bishops and priests of the area where they live, be close to them and venerate them. The faithful collaborate with them to the extent of their possibilities, but always in ways consistent with the sanctification of their professional work and their family duties.

For the priests, I will limit myself to recalling some words of the Pope regarding the ministry of confession. Let us be welcoming to all, witnesses of the tenderness of God, *attentive* in helping penitents to reflect on their actions, clear, available, prudent, and generous. With a magnanimous heart, we will celebrate the mystery of the infinite

18. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 372.

19. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 226.

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

mercy of a God who forgives.[20]

We should continue encouraging some members of the Prelature, Cooperators and young people, to offer to cooperate, with full freedom and personal responsibility, in catechesis, pre-marriage courses, and social works, in the parishes and other places which need them. These activities should be in accordance with their secular condition and lay mentality, and in doing them they do not depend in any way on the authority of the Prelature. At the same time, I would like to mention especially the men and women religious, who have done and are doing so much good for the Church and the world. "Anyone who does not love and venerate the religious state, is not a good child of mine," [21] our Father taught us. I rejoice, moreover, when I think of how many religious, in addition to diocesan priests, have seen their own vocation bloom in the warmth of the Work.

For greater service to the Church and solicitous attention to souls, the General Congress indicated that we should study, with creative imagination and flexibility, the best way to encourage and coordinate the apostolates. For example, occasionally some Centers of Opus Dei could be joined together in order to economize energies and facilitate joyful, affectionate family life. Or there can be more places with small, properly fitted out and flexibly organized apartments, so that we can give the means of formation to people right where they are: for example, in the focal points of cities, in areas where many people work, in zones of urban growth, or near high schools and universities.

New apostolic challenges

16. The General Congress reiterated the call made by the 2002 Congress, which Don Javier expressed as follows: to foster "a new culture, new legislation and new fashions, in keeping with the dignity of the human person and with its destiny to the glory of the children of God in Jesus Christ." [22] All the faithful of the Prelature, the St Raphael people and the Cooperators should feel that they are agents of this new culture, which has to overcome today's relativistic mentality. This challenge demands deep human, professional and doctrinal formation of everyone, according to their possibilities, and a strong presence in the forums to which they have access, with an open mentality that enables them to dialogue with everyone.

We also need a certain degree of influence, which we acquire if we take others seriously, and a personal *gift of tongues*, cultivated with a desire for permanent renewal. This will foster the sort of empathy

20. See Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et misera,* 20 November 2016, 10.

21. St. Josemaría, *Instruction*, May 1935-14 September 1950, note 5.

22. Don Javier, Letter, 28 November 2002, 11, in *Family Letters (5)*, 118.

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

which makes the Christian view of reality convincing, because it makes us aware of the existential questions of our neighbor, and keeps us from becoming strident or falling into a monologue. Respect for the dignity of every person despite their errors, and for the common good of society, plus calm, responsible work in collaboration with other citizens, make manifest the beauty and attractiveness of Christian values in the various spheres of society.

17. If we are to understand the complexity of certain sectors of social life, we need help from experts. Some examples are: the use of digital information and communication technologies; overseeing educational initiatives; institutional communications; the administration of university projects; the management and functioning of hospitals and clinics; social development projects; setting up and sustaining trusts, endowment funds, etc. The demand for professional competence is part of our lay mentality and is in step with the desires of our priestly soul: to perfect creation and to co-redeem.

To foster a new culture, it is necessary to *train* experts who have good criteria and, based on Christian anthropology, can help to tackle especially complex questions: gender, equality, conscientious objection, religious freedom, freedom of expression, bioethics, and the media, to mention only a few. Universities and research centers are the ideal places to study these subjects.

In addition, we should draw up a prudent, daring plan of formation suitable for each person, beginning with the youngest, to give their ideas solid foundations. We should not enclose ourselves in a merely defensive attitude, but should take on board the positive aspects of different views, dialogue with other people, learn from everyone, and respect their freedom assiduously, especially in matters open to various opinions.

18. A well-known saying of Blessed Paul VI is: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers." He continued, "and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." [23] In today's culture, we need faces that make a message credible. It is good then, to present attractive witnesses of a Christian life placed at the service of others. In addition to forming opinion-leaders, we need to encourage initiatives that spread information about the Church and, within it, the Opus Dei Prelature, including the use of social networks that can reach thousands of people immediately and effectively. The development of these initiatives depends on the generosity and creativity of those who support or run them.

19. Together with the personal apostolate of friendship and confidence, the Congress expressed its full support for the corporate and

23. Blessed Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 8 December 1975, 41.

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

personal works of apostolate. Their apostolic fruitfulness is proved by the integral formation that they give: they instruct, they educate, and they teach people to be open to serving others. These initiatives need to be able to reach many more people and introduce them gradually to the riches of the Christian faith, which frees them from fear and from sadness. For this faith to be lived out in daily life, we need to tailor the means of formation to families, to high school and college students, etc. This requires motivating people and preparing them well.

20. For the evangelization of society and the sustained development of the apostolate, it will be useful to have new educational centers where human and Christian formation can be provided for parents and for their children from their earliest childhood. When the creation of these centers is subject to legislation that impedes or makes it difficult for them to be corporate or personal works of apostolate, it may nevertheless be possible for their beneficiaries to receive spiritual attention from priests of the Prelature.

Importance of the family

21. The Pope teaches in his second encyclical: "In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity." [24] A person matures with time and by looking to the future with trust, and hence it is necessary to foster in families a deep sense of the virtue of hope.

We need to study practical ways to develop marriage preparation, to sustain the mutual love between spouses and Christian life within the family, and to foster the sacramental life of grandparents, parents and children, especially frequent confession. Christ embraces all ages of man. No one is useless or superfluous.

The Congress commended the activities of study groups focused on the educational, social and financial role of the family, with a view to shaping public opinion in favor of large families. We need to give more attention to people who are already in contact with the various apostolic instruments (kindergartens, schools, clubs, universities and residences).

Family Enrichment work, which Don Javier encouraged so strongly, continues to be a priority, for it contributes effectively to consolidating the mutual love between spouses and their openness to life. It also helps in leading the reality of the natural family into the joy of the family as a spiritual, Christian space. With many initiatives it is reaching more and more young families and providing formation to a wide range of people. It intro-

24. Pope Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, 24 May 2015, 213.

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

duces many people to the beauty of sacramental marriage, which is the image of the union of Christ with his Church (see *Eph* 5:32). With this sacrament the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit enters into their homes. In the mutual love of the parents, as in the liturgy and in the communion of the Church, God "loves us, he makes us see and experience his love, and since he has 'loved us first,' love can also blossom as a response within us." [25]

22. The Congress pointed out an apostolic field that has gained great importance in recent years: to contribute to the growth of the faith and the formation of the many immigrants coming from countries with a Catholic tradition (for example, the Philippines, Latin America, Poland, etc.) as well as giving them human formation. Besides helping them to develop their own identity, this formation makes them a true leaven for evangelization (see *Lk* 13:20) in the country which receives them. Throughout the world, the several dozens of churches entrusted by Bishops to priests incardinated in the Prelature can effectively support this work, following the pastoral plans of the diocesan Ordinaries on whom they depend.

The Work is in our hands

23. It is not only the Numeraries and Associates who should be taking our apostolates forward; the Supernumeraries too should be given many responsibilities and helped to carry them out. They need to feel the Work as their own, as if it were one of their own children. Thus, as our Father once said, "all of us together will dry many tears and raise the level of many people's lives. We will spread a lot of peace, and prevent many quarrels and conflicts. And we will bring people to look each other in the eye with Christian nobility, without hatred." [26] My Supernumerary children need to assist wholeheartedly in the St Raphael work, which has as its "immediate aim" to give "integral formation."[27] It is normal and even habitual in some places that Supernumeraries organize and run clubs for young people and other educational undertakings.

As the result of well-assimilated formation, without rigidity or anxiety, when it is prudent and suitable, the Supernumeraries collaborate with God in the birth of vocations of Numeraries and Associates. Aware of this possibility, they pray particularly for their own children, while with the greatest respect for personal freedom they leave everything in God's hands.

In St Gabriel work it is recommendable in some places to increase the number of Supernumeraries who are in charge of groups, or are coordinators, or give regular

25. Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, 25 December 2005, 17; see 1 *Jn* 4:10.

26. St. Josemaría, Notes from a get-together, 18 June 1974, in *Catequesis en América* (1974) vol. I, p. 549 (AGP, Library, P04).

27. St. Josemaría, *Letter 24 October 1942*, 3.

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

personal spiritual direction. Also we need to rely on them more to take care of retreats, and encourage them to spur forward the apostolate in places where there are not yet any Centers. It will also be good for Associates and Supernumeraries to take a more active part in the leadership groups and teams for specific apostolic initiatives. To facilitate their formation, suitable material will be made available to them in different languages.

Apostolate with youth

24. The General Congress stressed the importance of St Raphael work, "the apple of our eye." [28] It suggested giving priority to general and particular measures to develop the apostolate with all types of young people and, with God's grace, foster abundant vocations of young Numeraries and Associates. All the faithful of the Prelature and members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross will consider how they can help with prayer, mortification and action to reach many more young people.

In St Raphael work, a clear priority is forming young people to be "prayerful souls," [29] by teaching them in practical ways how to talk to God and how to listen to him. They should discover the human and supernatural value of true friendship, as well as the importance of study, reading, and professional excellence so as to serve the Church and society. Among the virtues that should be nurtured in these young people, the Congress mentioned fortitude and toughness, temperance (e.g., the sober and intelligent use of various technologies), and everything that helps them develop a spirit of service. It is important to teach these young people how to explain their faith in their families, with their friends in the various social media, and to draw out the practical consequences of following our Lord.

25. It is a marvelous thing to help young people and their parents discover and appreciate the attractiveness of dedicating oneself totally to God with an undivided heart, while at the same time presenting to them the beauty of the vocation to form a Christian family. In the St Raphael Centers that do apostolate with university students, it is worthwhile explaining the different aspects of courtship and marriage. Helpful resources in this regard are the testimonies of Supernumeraries, courses of Family Enrichment for single people, lectures, movies and readings of proven value. The urgent need for the witness of a greater number of Christian families calls us to be there for them at the beginning of this vocational path, even before they are engaged, with authentic respect and deep faith in the evangelizing mission of the Christian family, "a community of faith, hope and charity." [30]

28. *Ibid.*, 70.

29. *Ibid.*, 5.

30. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2204.

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

26. Let us enthusiastically continue the apostolate with university students and young professionals, both single and recently married. Here we can build on the formation that thousands of them have received in so many apostolic undertakings, especially the schools, youth clubs and St Raphael Centers. In this regard, it is recommendable to make the alumni associations more professional, using initiative and creativity to develop ways of continuing the apostolate with these people in the context of St Gabriel work, and encouraging many of them to become Cooperators.

27. Following the constant teaching of the Church, the experience of St Josemaría and the example and words of Pope Francis, we should emphasize the spiritual and corporal works of mercy in the St Raphael and St Gabriel means of formation. Personal activities and initiatives in the area of solidarity, service to those in need, and social responsibility are not something passing or marginal, but rather are at the very heart of the Gospel. Gaining a deeper understanding of the Church's social doctrine through activities like classes and lectures will especially help in situations where there is greater social inequality.

28. The universities that are apostolic works should continue promoting research that has an international impact, and creating opportunities for collaboration with intellectuals with a worldwide reputation. This work will help to develop scientific paradigms and conceptual models that are consistent with a Christian view of the human person, together with a conviction that society needs these perspectives in order to foster peace and social justice. This attitude of service to everyone is also expressed in friendship with colleagues from other universities.

Some priorities

29. Besides beginning stable apostolic work in new countries, the Congress suggested orienting our apostolic expansion toward some of the places where we are already working, which, because of the international bodies or centers of intellectual leadership found there, are very important for the future shape of society.

For the good of the Church and souls, the Congress encouraged the continuation of the publication and dissemination of the complete works of St Josemaría, as well as the corresponding historical research. Specifically, it suggested developing even more, and from different perspectives (academic, theological, sociological, and spiritual, among others) the central aspect of St Josemaría's message: the work of God's children as the "hinge" of sanctity and the natural setting for apostolate. This is a message with very many consequences for the Church and society.

30. Here I am coming to the end. After reading the previous

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

pages, you might be asking yourselves: among the many conclusions from the Congress, what are the priorities that our Lord is presenting to us at this historical moment of the world, the Church and the Work? The answer is clear: in the first place, to care for our union with God with the refinement of people in love, beginning with the contemplation of Jesus Christ, the face of the Father's Mercy. The program described by St Josemaría is always valid: "May you seek Christ, may you find Christ, may you love Christ." [31] The apostolate of the Work is and always has to be an overflowing of our interior life. Now is the time, my daughters and sons, to go deeper and deeper into the paths of contemplation in the middle of the world.

31. For decades the Church has turned her maternal attention to two priorities: the family and young people. As a small part of the Church, we too want to support the efforts of the recent Popes so that families respond with greater fidelity each day to the loving plans which God has laid out for them. At the same time we should help all young people, so that their dreams of love and service become a joyful reality. This idea of accompanying the family and young people provides a guiding principle for the conclusions of the Congress, and from it we can draw out many practical consequences for our daily apostolate.

Along with these priorities, I would like to emphasize the urgency that we all feel of enlarging our hearts – we ask God to give us hearts to his measure – so that there enter into it all the needs, pains and sufferings of the men and women of our time, especially the weakest. In today's world, poverty presents many faces: sick and elderly people treated with indifference, the loneliness felt by many abandoned people, the drama of refugees, and the destitution in which a large part of mankind lives, often as a result of injustices that cry out to Heaven. I know that all my daughters and all my sons will exercise "the creativity of charity" [32] in order to bring the balm of God's tenderness to all our brothers and sisters who are in need. "A friend of ours used to say: 'The poor are my best spiritual book and the main motive of my prayers. It pains me to see them, and in each one of them, Christ. And because it hurts, I realize I love him and love them.'" [33]

32. The Congress placed the conclusions that I have just transmitted to you explicitly into the hands of Our Lady. Only with her maternal mediation will we be able to move ahead in the exciting mission which has been entrusted to us as disciples of Jesus Christ. She is *Mater pulchrae dilectionis*, the Mother of Fair Love (see *Sir* 24:24), whose feast-day we celebrate today, 14th February, in the

31. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 382.

32. St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, 6 January 2001, 50.

33. St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, 827.

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

liturgical calendar of the Prelature. [34] On this day in 1930, God gave St Josemaría to see the vocation of women in Opus Dei and, in 1943, the place of priests in the Work. This underlined the unity of the Work, the unity of a "disorganized organization," [35] but above all the unity that is born from love, from being attentive to others, the children of her who is the "Mother of God and our Mother." [36]

Today, when we sang the *Te Deum* as an act of thanksgiving before our Lord solemnly exposed in the monstrance, I thought of you. "Communion, union, conversation, confidence: word, bread, love." [37] Considering how Jesus Christ, now hidden "in the Bread and in the Word," will come at the end of time, I asked him to come to help us and I entrusted all of you to his mercy.

33. My daughters and sons, if in this world, so beautiful and yet so tormented, anyone at any time feels alone, let them know that the Father is praying for them and is truly accompanying them in the Communion of Saints, and that he carries them in his heart. Here I like to recall how the liturgy sings of the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple, the liturgical feast that we celebrated on the 2nd of this month. It seemed, the liturgy says, that Simeon was carrying Jesus in his arms; in reality, it was the other way around. *Senex Puerum portabat, Puer autem senem regebat*.[38] The old man carried the child, but it was the Child who sustained the old man and guided him. That is how God supports us, even though at times we can only perceive the weight of souls. That is how he sustains us, through the "holy Communion of Saints." [39]

Per singulos dies, benedicimus te. Day after day we bless you, O Lord, with all the Church. "Every day," as Don Javier, a faithful son of St Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro, loved to repeat. A faithful son, as I say, who was determined to struggle daily to let himself be carried by divine Love. I raise my soul to God, Thrice-Holy, hand in hand with Our Lady, Mother of the Love that gives itself without measure. Grant, O Lord, that from faith in your Love, we may live each day with a love that is always new, in joyful hope.

With all my affection, I bless you.

Your Father,

Fernando

Rome, February 14, 2017

Feast of Our Lady, Mother of Fairest Love.

34. See Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Decree 626/12/L, 10 November 2012.

35. St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, 19.

36. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 11.

37. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, 535.

38. Liturgy of the Hours, Vespers of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, Antiphon *ad Magnificat.*

39. St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, 56.

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei