



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

[Home](#) - [News](#) - [In the news](#) - [Meet The Longest-Standing Member Of Opus Dei – Father Fernando Valenciano](#)

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By David Kerr and Alan Holdren, CNA

He may be nearly 89 years old, but Father Fernando Valenciano can still recall with crystal clarity the day over seven decades ago when his life changed forever.

“After the [war had ended in Spain](#), in 1939, I met a young man who studied law and he told me that he wanted to introduce me to a priest by the name of Josemaria.”

That priest was St. Josemaria Escriva, who had founded [Opus Dei](#) 11 years earlier. Their encounter lasted only a few minutes. Its legacy, though, has shaped the rest of Fr. Fernando’s life.

“He explained to me that [Opus Dei](#) was a group of dedicated people, that it was a form of serving God in the world, of being in the world, everyone serving God in their place in the world, sanctifying their tasks, as families, as professionals. That’s what he told me and nothing more.”

A month later the young Fernando met Fr. Josemaria again. This time the conversation was equally brief and equally significant, “I told him that I wanted to ask admission into Opus Dei. He said OK and so here I am.”

Fr. Valenciano spoke with CNA at the Roman headquarters of Opus Dei, in the [chapel where St. Josemaria Escriva now lies entombed beneath the altar](#). St. Josemaria died in 1975 and was canonized in 2002 by Pope John Paul II. He declared him to be “the saint of ordinary life.”

“I come here every day at least once and sometimes twice, to pray,” Fr Valenciano said, “to pray for the many things that need to be prayed for – fundamentally for the Church, for the Pope, for the Work, for perseverance, for people, and I mean the people of the entire world, not only Catholics, and also to

carry forward a good apostolate.”

Although he has been a member of Opus Dei for a record 72 years, Fr. Valenciano wasn't ordained a priest until two decades ago. As a cleric or layman, though, he tells us that his vocation has remained absolutely the same – the pursuit of holiness.

“As St. Paul said in his epistle, each one of us does this without leaving his respective place. And that's how I did it, working. I finished my degree and I began to work as an engineer in a construction company,” said Fr. Valenciano. “We have to do things well. It's the will of God. We need to do them for love of God, not looking out only for ourselves.”

Not surprisingly, he said the example given to him over many years living with St. Josemaria has been the biggest human influence in his own search for sanctity. “They used to say that he (St. Josemaria) was a man who knew how to let himself be loved but he never let things be done poorly precisely because he loved you and wanted you to be a good person, a servant of God in the whole world.”

And it is a saintly example he continues to learn more and more from even as he approaches his 89th birthday.

“I remember one time I invited someone to see a film about St. Josemaria in which he takes part in a group discussion, and he said he'd already seen it. And, I thought, you can tell that this guy hasn't understood anything because every time you see him again (St. Josemaria), you discover a new reality.”

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