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Pope Francis meets Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, left, the prelate of Opus Dei, and Msgr. Mariano Fa

Pope Francis meets Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, left, the prelate of Opus Dei, and Msgr. Mariano Fazio, the auxiliary vicar of the prelature, during an audience at the Vatican Nov. 29, 2021. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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The prelate of Opus Dei said members "accept with sincere filial obedience" the slight modifications Pope Francis made to the section of the Code of Canon Law dealing with personal prelatures.

"We follow the spirit with which St. Josemaría (Escriva) and his successors accepted any provision of the pope related to Opus Dei. Since the work belongs to both God and the church, the Holy Spirit is guiding us at all times," Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, the prelate, wrote in a statement Aug. 10.

The Vatican had announced Aug. 8 that Francis had promulgated slight changes to three articles in canon law dealing with personal prelatures in the church. Currently the only personal prelature is Opus Dei.

The changes, the pope said, were necessary after his 2022 constitution on the Roman Curia gave the Dicastery for Clergy responsibility for relations with personal prelatures; previously Opus Dei worked with and answered to the then-Congregation for Bishops.

The revised Canon 295 states that personal prelatures are "similar to public clerical associations of pontifical right with the ability to incardinate clerics" and are "governed by statutes approved or emanated by the Apostolic See." It says the prelate has "the faculties of an ordinary," including the right to establish seminaries and incardinate priests.

The revised Canon 296 about lay members of Opus Dei -- the vast majority of its membership -- now includes a reference to Canon 107, which states that the pastor and the ordinary of a baptized Catholic is determined by where the person lives.

But with personal prelatures, they enter into an additional, special relationship with the prelature and its mission.

Ocáriz said with the change referring to the laity -- "Opus Dei's reason for being: ordinary Christians in the middle of the world, who seek God through their professional work and ordinary life -- the fact that they are faithful of their dioceses, like any other Catholic, is made explicit. In the case of the work, moreover, they are members of this supernatural family, thanks to a specific vocational call."

The pope's changes to canon law will need to be "taken into account in adapting and updating the statutes of the work, which has been underway for a year," Ocáriz said. In April Opus Dei held an extraordinary general congress to complete the revision of its statutes and present them to the Dicastery for Clergy for approval.

The prelate asked members to pray "so that this work may come to fruition."

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Francis formally placed Opus Dei under the Dicastery for Clergy in July 2022 and, at the same time, said the head of the personal prelature of Opus Dei "will not be made, nor will he be able to be made" a bishop.

At the time, Ocáriz said that while the first two prelates of Opus Dei were bishops, "the episcopal ordination of the prelate was not and is not necessary for the guidance of Opus Dei."

Francis said his decision was meant "to strengthen the conviction that, for the protection of the particular gift of the Spirit, a form of government based more on charism than on hierarchical authority is needed."

Unlike a diocese or territorial prelature, a personal prelature unites clergy and laity committed to the same missionary or apostolic work. It can have its own seminaries and priests, as Opus Dei does.

Opus Dei counts about 93,000 members, of whom more than 2,000 are priests incarnated in the prelature.